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Jonah

FIGHTS BACK!

By ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

He must solve the secrets of an ancient science—or die!



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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

IN THE June 1951 issue of *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES*, we introduced Ivar Jorgensen as the author of the lead story "Whom the Gods Would Slay". This marked Ivar's first appearance in published fiction. The response was overwhelming. His story proved to be one of the most popular novels we had ever published—and, for a new author, Jorgensen received almost unprecedented recognition.

HOWEVER, much to our surprise, soon afterward a rumor got started that Ivar Jorgensen was just another pen-name for Milton Lesser, or Paul Fairman, or Don Wilcox, or William Tenn—to name just a few. As a matter of fact, even now—after all these months and the publication of several other Jorgensen stories—there is still a heated controversy going on among our readers regarding his actuality. (See "The Reader's Page" this issue.)

SINCE WE can't possibly produce Ivar in the flesh to each and every one of our more than 100,000 readers—we are reproducing below a photograph just received from him, taken on his brother's farm in Iowa. New to our field, Ivar is enjoying hugely the reports of his non-existence, and has captioned the photograph himself, a la Mark Twain.

HOW ABOUT it, you doubters? Convinced?

THE QUESTION of who was the first human being to fly in a rocket—if anybody—will be kicked around for a long time. But first—what's meant by a rocket? A jet plane with rocket assists? This has been done. But no human being has yet ever flown in a "pure" rocket—a rocket designed for space and unequipped with wings.

VERY RECENTLY, news was released that the first human being to make a flight in a rocket plane—self-contained and powered with conventional rocket engines—was a Nazi test pilot operating the experimental "Viper"—an anti-aircraft rocket designed to down Allied bombers during the closing hours of the Second World War.

THIS STUBBY fuselaged rocket plane equipped with rudimentary wings, but with no auxiliary power devices, and carrying a pilot, was launched in February of 1945. In its first test, the mechanism malfunctioned, and pilot and plane crashed.

SUBSEQUENTLY, our own experiments with rocket planes proved more successful. A rocket was able to complete a full flight, returning to Earth with pilot and rocket intact.

THE OPPORTUNITY for glory still remains, however, for the first human to go into space. So far, no altitude flights beyond the atmosphere have been made. All high altitude work with Neptunes and V-2's still remains a matter of remote control, although undoubtedly in the near future attempts will be made to send human beings to altitudes greater than 50 or 100 miles. There's still another opportunity for immortality for somebody. LES



"Reports of my non-existence have been greatly exaggerated," says Jorgensen

fantastic ADVENTURES

DECEMBER, 1951

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All Stories Complete

- * * * * *
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 Bill couldn't figure out why the girl he loved was trying to kill him. Could it be that they both belonged on another world—one where she was his enemy?

Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones

Illustrating a scene from the story "Jongor Fights Back!"

* * * * *

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It was bitter medicine Jongor gave the monkey men—and their own prescription, at that!

They used strange weapons to fight the jungle lord in his own backyard. Could cunning win out against technocracy?



Jongor FIGHTS BACK!

By ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

“WATCH OUT!” Jongor said, moving ahead carefully.

Behind him, Ann and Alan Hunter stopped in midstride, while their eyes



ranged the forest around them. "I don't see anything," Ann said, her rising voice betraying her fear and anxiety.

"I don't either," her brother answered. "But if Jongor says to watch out, you can bet he has some reason for it. Look! What's he going to do now?"

Ahead of them, Jongor's broad, heavily-muscled back was still visible. Spear held ready in his right hand, he was moving slowly forward. His manner indicated that he suspected there might be some danger close ahead but that he was not sure yet.

Across his back, the great bow which he always carried was visible. The feathered ends of arrows could be seen projecting from the quiver. He turned his head, called out in a soft voice to the two: "You stay there."

"What is it?" Ann called.

Jongor shook his head, did not answer.

"If we have any more trouble getting out of this place," the girl said softly to her brother, "I don't think I'll be able to stand it." Although the words she spoke indicated the possibility of distress, her whole appearance was the exact opposite. Clad in deerskin and wearing the deerskin moccasins that Jongor had made for her, her cheeks showing the glow of perfect health, she looked as if she could stand anything. Or take anything. The light rifle which she carried in two very capable brown hands made her look like a modern Diana.

"Lost Land* is trouble's natural home," her brother answered. "Anybody who gets into this place finds trouble. If he tries to get out, he finds more trouble."

His eyes ranged around the vast semicircle of swamp and jungle. In the far distance, tall mountains marked the natural boundaries of this lost

country. Behind them, miles away, was the spot where the Murto's still lived in squalor in a city which had once been a great mining town, thousands of years in the past. Far to the right, he could see the spot where the Arkians, the centaurs of lost antiquity, had once lived and died. All around them stretches of open water were visible, water broken by islands, by clumps of trees. In these swamps lived alligators thirty feet long.

"**B**UT BUCK up, Sis," Alan spoke again. "As long as Jongor is with us, we've got nothing to worry about."

His frank appraisal of the man in

*See *Jongor of Lost Land* (October 1940 FANTASTIC ADVENTURES) and *The Return of Jongor* (April 1941 FANTASTIC ADVENTURES). Jongor was the son of Captain Robert Gordon, U. S. naval aviator who, with his bride, had attempted to fly over the vast expanse of western Australia desert where Lost Land is located. Here, in a land unknown to the world at large, the primitive conditions of hundreds of thousands of years ago still prevail. In this vast area, some species of dinosaurs have survived, as have also the pterodactyls, the winged lizards which perhaps inspired the tales of flying dragons in the old legends, and other creatures which once lived on Earth in the old times. Lost Land is surrounded by mountains. These mountains in turn are surrounded by deserts, thus making exploration almost impossible. It is very probable, indeed, that this whole vast valley, hundreds of square miles in area, is actually the partly filled-in crater of an extinct volcano.

In attempting to fly over this area, Captain Robert Gordon's plane was caught in a fierce air current and he was forced to make a crash landing. He and his bride came out of the crash alive, but they were never able to find their way out of Lost Land. Here a son was born to them—John. John's first babyish effort to pronounce his name resulted in Jon-Gon, for John Gordon. As a result, his parents had always called him Jongor, and he had grown up known by that name. When Jongor was twelve, his parents were killed by pterodactyls. He was left alone to survive in a jungle land where danger lurked behind every bush and death lurked at every waterhole. The boy managed to survive and in the process of survival became a black-haired, thick-cheeked, stubby-muscled giant.

Alan Hunter was an adventurous youth who also penetrated Lost Land and couldn't find his way out. His sister Ann put off her own wedding to a wealthy debutante to come and search for him. She found Jongor; Jongor found Alan. In the search, their first and overgrown bands of Murto, degenerate descendants of a colonial outpost exterminated as a mining colony in this valley in long-gone times by the Murto's, the inhabitants of the area, the three were leaving the valley, the Murto, under the leadership of Great Orbo and his lieutenant, Gasker, wished them not returning. Coming back, they were forced to go to the land of the Arkians, a race of centaurs that had survived in this vast wilderness, and to witness the destruction of the last citadel of the Arkians.

The Murto still possess some of the science of their ancestors, but it is a degenerate science, and by race, with no real understanding of the principles involved. They have sunk so low that the only weapons they have left which they know how to use are clubs and spears, although they have legends of other days when they had other, far stronger, weapons.

Jongor, Ann and Alan Hunter are again leaving Lost Land to return to America, when this story opens.

leopard-skin breechclout ahead of them was based on past experience. Both Alan and Ann had seen this man of the jungle in action. Both had unlimited confidence in him. Without him, each knew they would have little chance of surviving long enough to escape from Lost Land.

Somewhere in the grove of trees ahead of them a frightened bird twittered. Far off in the swamps, a hull alligator bellowed. Everything seemed normal, for Lost Land.

"I don't hear or see anything," Ann spoke again, restlessly. She lifted the light rifle she carried in the crook of her arm to the ready position. "But just in case..."

Her brother did the same. "When you don't see or hear anything in this place, that's the time to watch out," Alan said. "What the heck is that?" His voice lifted sharply.

Out of the grove of trees ahead of them came a man who was at least nine feet tall. Clad in what seemed to be a suit of armor, a thick-plumed helmet on his head, a heavy, two-bladed battle axe clasped in both hands, he advanced straight toward Jongor.

"Where—where did that come from?" Alan Hunter gasped.

"Jongor, get away!" Ann screamed.

Jongor stood his ground. His spear was lifted, the bright blade glittered in the sunlight.

The girl lifted the light rifle that she carried. If Jongor had no more sense than to stand and be killed by a giant in armor, she would do what she could to protect him. Her eyes went along the sights.

Suddenly there was a loud crashing sound and the gun was knocked from her hands by a club. As she turned startled eyes in the direction from which the club had been thrown, she saw something that sent a paralyzing

fear through her body.

"Murto!" she screamed.

Out of the trees on the right, the degenerate monkey-men were pouring in a roaring flood. Beside her, she saw Alan throw up his rifle and fire one quick shot. A charging Murto went down. But Alan had time to fire only the one shot, and then the wave of charging Murtos were upon them.

"Jongor!" she screamed.

She saw him turn his head in her direction, one quick glance. At the same instant, the armor-clad giant rushed forward and struck down with his huge axe straight at Jongor.

One glimpse she got of the giant before she was knocked to the ground. A Murto fell on top of her.

JONGOR, ADVANCING toward the grove of trees, had expected to find a group of Murtos hiding there. His keen ears had caught a slight sound which indicated the presence of the monkey-men of Lost Land. He had no fear of them; he was sure he could send them running.

When the giant came striding out of the grove of trees, Jongor was thoroughly surprised. He thought he knew Lost Land fairly well, but in all that vast expanse of territory he had never seen anything like this.

The sharp spat of the girl's rifle, and her scream, broke the shock that held him. Out of the corner of his eye, he caught a glimpse of the charging Murto. He would have turned then and gone to Ann's rescue, but the monster was upon him.

"Ho!" the creature shouted. "Ho, pygmy! Die!" And he brought the axe down with enough strength behind it to have split Jongor from head to toe.

Only the axe didn't land on its target. Somehow, at the last minute, its victim had moved, had twisted to one side.

"Uh!" the astounded giant grunted. The axe was buried deep in the ground. He stared at it stupidly. The Murtos had promised him a reward for killing this insignificant creature, and he intended to finish his job.

But as he tried to wrench the weapon from the ground, Jongor's spear came up. With all his strength behind it, Jongor rammed the spear against the giant's chest.

The tough chain armor turned the point aside. But under the force of the blow, the giant was thrust backward. He fell heavily, nothing harmed except his dignity. Snatching at the handle of the axe, he came scrambling to his feet.

"Help!" Ann Hunter's voice came.

Jongor was already turning to see what had happened to Ann and Alan. He saw they were down under what looked to be a tidal wave of Murtos. And the Murtos, having captured Ann and Alan, were turning toward him.

One Murto he recognized. Great Orbo, the leader of the bunch. Orbo was flinging up a hand and pointing toward him.

"Get him!" Great Orbo ordered.

One Murto, or a dozen Murtos, Jongor could handle. But a whole swarm of the monkey-men were coming toward him. Near him, that incredible giant was tugging his axe out of the ground.

THERE WAS only one thing Jongor could do—run. If he could get away, there would be a day of reckoning for the Murtos, possibly also for the giant. Already the monster was swinging the axe at him again.

"Get him!" Great Orbo yelled. "Two extra wives for the one who catches him!"

The Murtos poured after the jungle lord as he fled for the grove of trees.

He did not see the thrown club

whirling through the air, did not know that a club had been thrown until it bit him. The blow was a savage one. The club struck the back of his head just at the base of the brain.

As he went down, blackness closed over him.

The blackness lasted but an instant. Then he was on his feet and running again. If any damage had been done to him, it did not show in his gait.

But no human being who ever lived could withstand such a blow from a thrown club and not suffer damage.

ANN HUNTER, stumbling along, her hands tied behind her back with a rope which was held by a Murto following her, felt the tears stream down her cheeks. All hope of escaping from this land was gone. Nothing could save her now, not even Jongor. Besides, she had seen Jongor run. She repeated that fact over and over again, as if she were not prepared even yet to believe what her eyes had seen.

"What did you expect him to do, stay there and get his skull split open?" her brother pointed out. "Even Jongor couldn't lick twenty to thirty Murtos and that—" he paused, groping for words to describe the creature striding along ahead of them. "—that giant!"

Calazao, the giant, was walking with Great Orbo. Calazao had the battle axe swung over his shoulder and he was talking freely, in a voice that had the tones of remote thunder in it.

"I would have killed him; I do not know how he got away from me," Calazao was saying. "The next time I see him, I'll fix him, but good." He spoke in the language of the Murtos, which both Ann and Alan understood.

"The next time you see him, you will probably run so fast your shadow won't be able to keep up with you!" Ann shouted.

"Shhh, Sis!" Alan expostulated. "Anyhow, a minute ago you were wailing because Jongor had run away, now you're yelling what he is going to do when he comes back."

Calazao and Great Orbo turned their heads. "Ho! So he is coming back, is he? Ho, so I will run from him, will I? Ho!" Calazao swung the battle axe experimentally around his head. He repeated again what he would do to Jongor.

"Sometimes it pays to keep your mouth shut, Sis," Alan Hunter advised. "Calazao will be on the watch for Jongor now."

"He would be on the watch anyhow," Ann answered.

"Move along, you." The Murto holding the rope emphasized his command by jerking it, with the result that the girl was pulled off her feet.

"Get up, get up," the Murto said, kicking her.

"You jerked her to the ground, now you're kicking her because she fell!" Alan Hunter raged. Weaponless, his hands tied behind his back, he butted the Murto in the stomach with his head.

The monkey-man fell over backward. When he scrambled to his feet, he was waving a club. Rage showed in his close-set eyes. "I'll fix you for that."

"Stop it, stop it!" Orbo screamed. "I'll have your tail cut off if you disobey me."

"He hit me!" the enraged Murto yelled.

"When I hit you, you will know you have really been hit!" Orbo answered. "I'll have your tail cut off for sure if you utter another word."

Under this threat, the sullen Murto subsided. Ann and Alan got slowly to their feet and resumed their march. Obviously they were being taken back again to the old city of the Murtos.

IN PHYSICAL appearance, the Murtos were shorter than the average human, but they were more heavily built, their squat muscular bodies covered with thin, soft fur. They looked a lot like gorillas, though none of them was as big or as heavy as the great apes. The size and the shape of their heads indicated an almost human intelligence. They looked like beast men, creatures which had evolved past the level of beasts but had not quite reached the human level. Their resemblance to animals was further increased by the fact that each possessed a long, bushy tail.

Among the Murtos, not only was the possession of this tail a mark of achievement, but a bigger, better tail entitled its possessor to the respect of the others. Great Orbo, the leader and ruler, had a tail that was long enough to curl around his neck. It was also extremely bushy. Except for hammered metal ornaments on their arms, the Murtos were entirely naked. Their weapons consisted of clubs and short spears.

As she stumbled along, Ann furtively watched the jungle on both sides of her. Jongor would find her, he would rescue her. She had no doubt whatsoever that this gray-eyed jungle giant, who had managed to survive his whole life here in the vast treacherous hell of Lost Land, could do anything he set his mind on doing.

Umber, the second in command of this group, came past her, moving toward the head of the column. He paused to leer at her. "Female, how would you like to belong to me?"

"I'd rather be dead," the miserable girl answered.

Umber grinned at her.

"You get on about your business," Alan Hunter spoke.

"This for you!" Rage showed in the Murto's eyes. Lifting the spear he car-

ried, he brought the flat of the blade hard up against the head of the youth.

"You leave him alone," Ann screamed.

Umber bared fighting fangs in what he thought was a placating grin, and moved up to the head of the column where Orbo and Calazao were finding a path through the jungle growth. Alan got slowly to his feet. Blood was streaming down his cheek where the blade of the spear had landed.

"Are you hurt, Alan?"

The youth ran his fingers over his cheek. His eyes glistened. "Some day I hope to catch that Murto when both of us have the same weapon!"

Up ahead of them, Orbo, Umber and Calazao were engaged in heated talk.

"She is to be the bride of the Sun," Orbo was saying. "That was decided long ago. 'Or the bride of the Great Lost God, if he should speak and claim her."

Ann Hunter shuddered. These creatures were sun worshippers, their god was the flaming orb of light that moved across the sky each day. To be the bride of the sun meant being sacrificed on the altar of the sun. She did not know what the Great Lost God was, and did not want to learn.

"That is what she will be," Orbo was saying. "Unless she is not perfect enough to become the bride of the sun. In which case I shall keep her for myself."

"It looks as if whichever way it goes, you are going to get the raw end of the deal, Sis," Alan Hunter said, his voice desperate.

Again Ann's eyes swept the jungle around her, looking, praying, for Jongor. "He'll come," she told herself over and over again. "He'll find us."

IT WAS well for the peace of mind of Ann Hunter that she could not see Jongor at that moment. He was leisurely stalking a deer in an open

glade. In his mind was only the thought that he was hungry, that the deer would make an excellent and appetizing meal. In his mind was no thought whatsoever of Ann or Alan Hunter.

So far as he was concerned, they had never existed.

He had no memory of them!

The club thrown by the Murto that had struck him on the back of the head and had knocked him down had almost cracked his skull, with the result that deep inside the gray matter of his brain, certain pressures had been set up. So that his mind had slipped back across a span of time roughly equivalent to one year.

He had no memory of ever having known Ann or Alan Hunter. He was simply Jongor, the youth who had grown up in Lost Land, the youth who lived by his wits, his cunning, and his strength.

It is a strange characteristic of the human mind that as the result of a blow the memory will sometimes regress across a definite period of time. For recent events there may be complete amnesia, complete forgetfulness. A person injured in an accident may not be able to recall any of the events leading up to the accident. His memory may regress to the day before the accident, or two days, or a week.

This lost memory may be recovered. Or it may not. Recovery depends to a large degree on what happens to the individual.

Jongor was aware of a dull ache somewhere deep in the recesses of his brain. Every so often he shook his head at the ache, thinking thus to make it go away. It did not go away. He soon learned to ignore it. He was also aware of a vague, fleeting picture that from time to time tried to emerge within his mind—the picture of a female. His impression was that this was

his mother. She was the only woman he had ever known.

Or had he known another woman?

He tried to think, wrinkling his forehead in the process. The picture in his mind went away. With the sight, finally, of the deer feeding clearly before him, he forgot all about the picture of the woman that had tried to form in his mind.

THE DEER was feeding, and not aware of the danger present. In the recesses of the leafy growth, Jongor carefully fitted an arrow to his bow. The bow stave creaked as he drew the feathered end of the shaft to his right ear.

"Fly straight," he whispered to the arrow, releasing it.

Struck just back of his shoulder, the deer gave a great bound, the single convulsive leap that often comes when the death blow has been taken, and fell dead. The arrow had penetrated its heart. Jongor cut succulent steaks from the carcass, sought a secluded spot, and built a small fire using an ordinary cigarette lighter to start the blaze.

As he used the lighter he stared at it, thoughtfully, as if he wondered where he had gotten such a thing and how it operated. The gray multi-veined crystal that he wore on his left wrist he knew about, knew where he had gotten it, and how it was used. But this little gadget that could be used to start a fire...

Alan Hunter had given it to him only months before. But this was blocked out of his mind.

Squatting beside the fire, he was aware of sounds off in the jungle. Not animal sounds, not Murto noises.

The noise of men!

Slipping the great bow on his back and picking up the spear, he rose quickly to his feet.

THE TWO men had made a hasty camp at the edge of a bluff. Above them, rising in a series of graduated tiers, was a cliff. In front of them was a cleared space so that no danger could approach unseen. That much precaution they had taken.

What little camp equipment they had was scattered about. It was not much. A medicine kit, an ammunition box, two smaller metal boxes which apparently contained food. Or had contained it.

Two high-powered sporting rifles rested against the base of the cliff. Each of the two men had a heavy pistol holstered at his hip. Hanging across from each pistol was a heavy hunting knife.

"Those worthless Blackfellows would desert just at the time when we needed them most," Gnomer, the taller of the two, spoke. Anger sounded in his voice as he held the haunch of venison roasting over the fire. He was burly, black-bearded, and looked to be every inch a ruffian.

"Yeah," Rouse, his partner, answered. "They knew when to get out. If I ever find one of those devils between the sights of my rifle, there's going to be one less Blackie in this section."

"You'll never catch one," Gnomer answered, a sneer in his voice. "If you had been on the watch, like I told you, they'd never have had a chance to get away on us."

"I couldn't help it because I fell asleep," Rouse grumbled. "I was watching 'em. I must have nodded. I swear I didn't close my eyes, but I must have closed 'em for a minute or two. Suddenly, no bearers."

"You probably closed your eyes for a couple of hours," Gnomer said bitterly. "While you were nodding, they had time to take most of our gear and clear out, including the maps." Anger

crept into his voice. "Damn it, I ought to put a bullet in you for letting them get away with the maps."

Rouse, lounging on the ground, twisted uneasily. "What difference does it make?" he answered. "Heck, we got here, didn't we, maps or no maps?"

"We got here all right, but now that we're here, how in the hell are we going to find what we're looking for without a map?"

"We'll find it. It's got to be here somewhere."

Gnomer swept his free hand in an arc that included the whole of Lost Land. "Yeah, and you see how big this damned place is. Without a map, we could hunt for years without finding what we're looking for."

"Well, I couldn't help it," Rouse defended weakly.

AS QUIETLY as a moving shadow, Jongor came down the series of ledges above the two men. He could move through jungle growth with an effortless ease that left no trace of his passage. Coming down the series of ledges was simple. He reached the ledge directly above the two men without either knowing that he existed.

At sight of them, something stirred in him, like a hunger. But his belly was full, he could not be hungry for food. What, then, was this feeling that came into existence inside of him at the sight of the two men?

Although he did not know it, the feeling in him was hunger for the companionship of his own kind. While his memory of Ann and Alan Hunter was blocked, there still remained in him a nostalgic emotional pressure, a sort of pseudo-memory of the happy times he had had with them. It was good to be with humans, good to be with your own kind. Even the Murtoas showed a fondness for the company of their fellows.

Seeing these two men, Jongor wanted to be with them, to talk to them. His only memory of humans at this point was of his father and mother. They had invariably been kind to him. He reasoned that all humans were the same as his parents had been.

Standing erect on the ledge, he called out, "Hello."

The sight of the tall, skin-clad giant suddenly standing up on the ledge above them startled Gnomer so much that he dropped the venison into the fire. With a single motion of his hand, he snatched the heavy pistol from his hip.

"Who are you?"

Jongor was already dropping lightly and lithely from the ledge to the ground. A smile on his face, the spear grasped in his right hand, his left hand extended palm outward in the ancient human gesture of friendship, he advanced toward them.

Gnomer held his fire. Rouse, snatching hastily at one of the rifles leaning against the rock wall, jerked it up to his shoulder.

"Stop it!" Gnomer ordered.

"But—"

"I said to stop it and I meant exactly what I said." Gnomer's voice was hard and flat. Very slightly, he shifted the muzzle of the pistol he held so that instead of covering Jongor, it covered his partner, a movement that was not lost on Rouse. "But..." Rouse lowered the rifle.

"I beg your pardon," Jongor said. He knew he had startled these two men, but he also had the impression that something was not right here. Had he done something wrong? "I am Jongor," he said. "I saw your fire and stopped to talk." To him, this was a simple statement of fact.

"Oh," Gnomer said. Then he repeated the single sound again, "Oh." Gnomer's mind was working with

lightning-like rapidity. He was badly startled. The last thing on earth he had expected to see here in this valley was a white man muscled like an Apollo and armed with utterly primitive weapons. But, now that Jongor had appeared before him, he had a choice of believing such a thing could exist or of doubting his own eyes. "Well—well, sit down. You startled us. Who are you?" His own voice had taken on sympathetic tones.

SQUATTING ON his heels, Jongor told them the story of his life. The doubt on the faces of the two men changed to wonder. "Well, whatta you know!" Rouse kept saying, over and over again. He glanced out of the corner of his eye at his partner, as if he had an idea of some kind. Gnomer paid him no attention. Gnomer already had the same idea.

"So you've lived here all your life?" Gnomer questioned.

"Yes," Jongor answered.

"Then you must know this valley pretty well."

"Fairly well. I haven't been over all of it. There are places here it is well to stay away from."

"If you want my opinion, it's damned good sense to stay away from the whole blasted place!" Rouse spoke.

"Nobody asked your opinion," Gnomer said. Rouse lapsed into quick silence. Gnomer turned his attention back to Jongor. "Did you ever hear of an old, wrecked city where some kind of missing links live?"

"Missing links?"

"Yech. Half human, half monkey."

"You must mean the Murtos," Jongor said. A fleeting expression of anger crossed his face, and was gone almost as soon as it appeared.

"I don't know what you call 'em. Could you show us how to get to this Murto city?"

"I suppose I could." A frown crossed

Jongor's face. "But why do you want to go there?"

"Because—" Rouse began.

"We are scientists," Gnomer said quickly. "We were sent here by an organization that is devoted to pure research. We have heard rumors of these Murtos and it is our job to investigate them, to determine if they are really the long-sought missing link." His voice was suave and guileless. Rouse looked at him in startled surprise.

"Scientists?" Jongor said. "I do not believe I know the meaning of the word."

"Scientists are people who devote their lives to solving the problems of the world, who explore the unknown, who search out new facts of nature and give them to the world so that all may benefit. From what you have told me of them, your parents must have been scientists. Certainly they were exploring a new world when they attempted to fly across this lost valley here."

"Oh," Jongor said. This man's words listened good, they sounded brave and honest and truthful, but somewhere about them he seemed to detect a feeling of insincerity. Was this man lying as the Murtos often lied? Jongor did not know. He shook his head.

"No, I will not show you how to reach the city of the Murtos," he said.

THE GUN, which Gnomer had holstered again at his hip, came out like a flash of moving light. Jongor knew guns. His father had owned one here in this land, he knew what they could and would do. "Get your hands above your head!" Gnomer snapped.

"But you said you were scientists—"

"It doesn't matter what I said. Get your hands above your head and turn around. If you make a wrong move, I'll blow your guts out through your backbone."

Silently, Jongor obeyed. He did not

begin to understand the reasons back of this man's actions. He had come to them seeking companionship, seeking friends. He would have been a friend to these people. Now Gnomer was pointing a gun at him, threatening him with death, telling him to turn around. Were all men like this? Was this the way men treated their friends?

He felt his hands jerked down behind his back and tied there.

"Now I guess you will guide us to the city of the Murtos!" Gnomer said, triumph in his voice.

"But why do you want to go there? Is it because of the diamonds and the gold?"

"Diamonds? Gold?" Rouse spoke, his eyes wide. "Are things like that to be found there?"

"The Murtos were once miners," Jongor said. "Yes they have tremendous stores of both jewels and gold."

"Holy hell!" Gnomer whispered. "That wasn't the reason. But now that we know about it, it *is* a reason for going there. We'll start first thing in the morning. And don't get any ideas that you can get away during the night, because you're not going to slip away from us now, not until you have guided us to the city of the Murtos, anyhow!"

Gnomer sounded like a man who has stumbled into unexpected good fortune. "Even if you did lose the maps, I've got a better one," he said to Rouse, nodding toward Jongor.

Anger rose in Jongor, then subsided. He was trapped and he knew it. The first of his own kind he had ever met had tricked and trapped him. Or were these men the first of his own kind he had ever met?

The gray ghost of memory went flitting through his brain, came and went too fast for him to grasp it.

The two men were asking him questions, dozens of them, about the Mur-

tos and the city of that ancient people, where it was located, and how best to get there the fastest. He answered them with dignity. Deep inside of him a feeling of anger was building up again. But it was helpless anger. For the time being.

IN THE silence of the night, the girl worked desperately with the leathery thongs that bound her wrists. Near her, she was aware that Alan was awake and was working too, as silently and as desperately as she. Near the great fire the Murtos had built, Calazao snored like some rusty steam engine. The Murtos themselves slept restlessly, each as near the fire as he could get without danger to himself. Guards had been posted; they were alert and apprehensive. To these creatures the night was a traditional time of danger. Off in the darkness somewhere a lion coughed. At the sound, a frightened monkey chattered.

Ann and Alan Hunter lay a little apart from the Murtos. If they could get their hands and feet free, they could perhaps slip quietly into the overhanging foliage nearby. After that, they would be free. Free in Lost Land, where death lurked on every hand. Better the freedom and the danger of Lost Land than captivity by the Murtos!

"Sis," Alan Hunter's soft whisper came.

"Yes."

"I've got my hands free."

Ann felt her heart jump at the words. She was aware that Alan was moving, was sliding slowly across the ground, coming nearer and nearer to her. She felt his fingers begin to explore her wrists.

A restless Murto awakened. It was Umber, she recognized vaguely by the light of the fire. Apparently groping in a nightmare, Umber stumbled to-

ward them. The girl held her breath.

"Get away from her!" She heard Umber kick at Alan. Twisting, she saw that Alan had rolled away. "And don't you come near her again!" the Murto repeated.

"He's my brother, he can come as close to me as he wants," Ann said quickly, in the Murto language.

"Shhh, Sis," Alan said, in English. "Don't provoke him."

"What is that strange talk?" Umber demanded.

"N—nothing," the girl faltered. "He just said that—that—we should do as you say."

"Good," Umber said. Satisfaction sounded in his voice. Apparently he was still half asleep. He dropped to his knees beside her. His hands sought her face, turned it toward him.

HER FIRST startled thought was that he was going to kiss her. But among the Murtos, kissing had never been discovered. They showed their affection by rubbing noses. The girl felt the hot breath of the Murto on her face, felt his nose gently touching her. Panic rolled through her like a shock wave.

She wanted to scream, knew she did not dare. If she cried out, she would attract the attention of the other Murtos. Perhaps that would save her from this indignity but, on the other hand, it might mean just the opposite. Also, there was the danger that they would find out that Alan had freed his hands. If that fact was discovered, their chance of escape would be lost.

The girl stifled her screams within her.

"You beautiful creature," Umber whispered to her.

"You dirty beast!" the girl answered, in English.

"What does that mean?"

"It means how strong you are!"

"Ah!" She could almost hear a purr of satisfaction in Umber's voice. Again his nose touched hers, again she could feel his breath upon her face. Pressure rose in her, pressure that she could no longer force down. It came explosively to the surface, in the form of an ear-splitting scream.

"What's that?"

"What goes?"

Awakened by the scream, the alarmed Murtos were instantly aroused. Even Calazao scrambled to his feet. Grasping his axe, he looked around for the enemy that had disturbed his rest.

Umber, spitting like an angry cobra, rose to his feet. "The girl is having a nightmare," he explained.

It was an explanation that Ann was glad enough to accept. She lay quiet, not moving again and not uttering a sound. Alan did the same. Eventually the snores of Calazao sounded again and the whole camp was quiet. Again she felt Alan's fingers tugging at the leather cords which bound her wrists. Minutes later, they both were free and were slipping like twin shadows into the moonlit jungle night. Alan hesitated long enough to filch a spear from a sleeping Murto.

In the jungle, a restless sentry moved. They slipped around him. The camp of the Murtos was behind them. Each felt a surge of exultation pour through his veins.

"We've got away, Alan, we're free!" Ann whispered.

"Never say die!" Alan answered. Nothing ever daunted Alan Hunter for long. "Now to find Jongor. I don't understand what happened to him. I was dead certain he would be somewhere around this camp tonight."

"Maybe he is here somewhere," Ann said eagerly. "Maybe he was just waiting for a good chance to set us free. We'll get away from here and find

a place to hide, and maybe he'll find us tomorrow. I bet he will. Without him..." She didn't finish what she had started to say, but both knew that getting out of Lost Land without Jongor to help them would be a hard job indeed, if not impossible.

"Come on," Alan said. "Let's scat away from here."

They began to put distance between them and the Murto camp. Off in the distance, a lion coughed, then was silent.

Although neither of them knew it, as they slipped away from the Murto camp, a monkey-man quietly followed them. The Murto was Umber. Heavy club in hand, Umber followed the two humans like a silent, invisible shadow. In the darkness, one blow of the club ought to take care of the girl's brother. After that, the girl would be his to do with as he pleased.

THEY MOVED furtively through the moon-drenched night. Under the rays of the moon, Lost Land was a fantastically beautiful place, but neither had an eye for the scenery at this moment. Ann heard a rustle of sound off to the left. She pretended not to notice it. Alan went forward resolutely. If he heard anything, he did not call it to her attention. From the far distance came the full-throated roar of a lion. Neither of them gave any thought to the sound. A roaring lion was not on the hunt. But the sound served to remind them of the dangers existing here, if they had needed any reminder. Another sound came, from behind them.

"Alan, we're being followed," Ann whispered.

The youth turned. Grasping the spear firmly, he listened. "I don't hear anything," he said.

"I don't hear anything now," the girl answered. "But—"

"It's some animal," Alan said. "Or

maybe it's your imagination."

"It's not my imagination," the girl answered indignantly.

"Come on," he ordered bluntly.

She followed him as he found his way through a grove of trees. The darkness here was most intense. She knew that Alan was groping his way forward without really being able to see where he was going. Suddenly he stopped.

"What is it?" the girl whispered.

"Here, I'll give you a hand up," her brother answered.

"What—"

"You're going up into a tree," the youth answered firmly. She felt his hands catch her, lift her. Groping upward against the rough bark of a tree, she found a limb. She threw a leg over it, drew herself up.

"You come too," she whispered.

"I'm going to stay down here for a while," he answered. "You get yourself securely settled up there."

"But—"

"Shhh!" his whisper came from below, warning her to be silent.

Her ears caught a sound, coming from the edge of the grove, a soft rustle as of a body brushing lightly against foliage. The sound shocked her into silence. Through this darkness, something was coming. Something? It might be anything! The only certain thing was that it was not friendly. She groped upward, found another limb, lifted herself again. Settling herself on it, she clung to the bole of the tree, and listened with over-keen ears to the sounds of the jungle night.

SOMETHING WAS moving through that darkness. The soft, almost undistinguishable sounds of stealthy movement came to her ears. She was not certain that she heard the sounds. Perhaps she sensed them, with some higher perception of danger that the human being seems to possess when

under stress. Was Alan hearing them? She thought of calling out to him, put the thought out of her mind almost as soon as it entered. Calling out might warn Alan; it would certainly warn the creature that was coming through the darkness below her. She strained her eyes trying to see. Here and there streaks of moonlight filtered down through openings in the tree tops above her. She tried to watch the patches of light below her. The creature moving down there evaded the moonlight.

"Ugh!"

Crash!

THUD!

In rapid succession, the three sounds came from below her. The first, she was certain, came from Alan in the form of a sudden, startled grunt. The crash and the thud she could not identify, but she had the dazed impression they were the result of weapons meeting flesh.

"Damn you!" That was Alan speaking. This much was certain. The answer was a spitting grunt that could have come from the mouth of almost any living creature. Following the grunt came the sound of a furious struggle, bodies thrashing on the ground, a sudden sharp cry of pain, a thud, a grunt, a "Take that, damn you!"

Ann Hunter hesitated for only a split second, then she started down the tree. No matter what happened to her, she intended to go down there and help her brother.

Almost as soon as she started, she stopped. The struggle had ended. Suddenly. One instant there was a fight, then there was a thud, then there was silence. The whole shocked grove of trees was silent. The silence seemed to indicate that tragedy had taken place down there in the darkness below her and the whole world, knowing it, was trying to keep quiet.

Ann listened with bated breath. She could hear someone—or something—breathing heavily.

"Alan?" she whispered.

There was no answer. She could hear movement. Something touched the tree. Something was coming up the tree.

"Alan?"

Something groped forward from the darkness below and touched her. It was a paw!

The creature coming up the tree was a Murto!

The night was split with the sudden explosive violence of Ann Hunter's scream.

WITH THE blow of the club that had struck Jongor and had knocked from his mind all memory of recent events had also come an apathy, an indifference. Not caring much what happened to him, he suffered the two men to force him to guide them. For two days they went westward, picking their way through the jungle, skirting the stretches of open water, wading through reedy swamps. Gnomer and Rouse cursed the country with unrestrained profanity. Jongor shrugged. He was accustomed to this country and to this way of life.

The two men guarded him very closely. While they were on the march, they kept his hands tied behind his back. When they stopped to eat, they untied his hands, but Gnomer always sat a few feet away from him with his rifle ready.

Jongor tried to talk to the two men. "Why do you wish to go to the city of the Murto?"

"Maybe it's so we can get rich," Gnomer answered. "From what you told us, these Murto were once a colony of miners. For generations, they piled up wealth here—"

"But you only knew about that af-

ter I told you," Jongor pointed out. "You have some other reason for coming here?"

"Another reason?" Gnomer shrugged. "We had heard about this place. What better reason could anyone have than the hope of getting rich?"

"What is being rich?" Jongor asked.

The two men stared at him. They tried to explain. It was having money, much money, a big house, cars, servants. He stared back at them. "What good are these things?" he asked.

Gnomer shook his head then. Glancing at his partner, he tapped his temple.

Jongor did not understand the gesture. He did not know Gnomer was indicating that in his opinion Jongor was not quite normal. But Jongor did notice that after that the men were wary of him. He did not like it. There were other things he did not like, including the severe headaches that he was suffering. He was aware, also, of a ghost of a memory that kept trying to struggle to his attention. Something about a girl...

He could never quite get the picture.

"All right, get up and get going," Gnomer ordered, rising to his feet.

Jongor shrugged and rose. He did not like what was said, he did not like the tone of voice. But what could he do about it? There was the little matter of the rifle. There was another little matter of his hands' being tied behind his back at all times except when they were eating. Gnomer was an expert with the rope. Jongor had tested the knots surreptitiously. They didn't give. And the rope was strong, much too strong even for his mighty muscles.

stances, Jongor would never have fallen from so slight a stumble as this. But with his hands tied behind his back, his balance was difficult to hold. He went down.

Rouse kicked him in the rear. "Get up, get up, you big clumsy ape. Hey, what's the matter with you?" The last was a startled shout as Jongor turned toward Rouse.

The face that Rouse saw was a face that was hot with anger. Jongor had been kicked. It was the first time in his life this indignity had been offered to him. His response was an instant, hot anger. So much of the rage showed on his face that Rouse was almost frightened. The man hastily lifted his rifle.

"Hey!" he repeated.

"What is it?" Gnomer said.

"Don't kick me again!" Jongor said. Turning, he plodded forward.

But the kick had been enough to shake him out of his apathy. He still had no memory of recent events, but the indifference was gone. He applied more pressure to the ropes.

"Go on, see if you can break them!" Rouse jeered.

"Some day I'll break your neck," Jongor answered.

Rouse fingered the rifle.

"Better lay off him," Gnomer ordered.

That night they camped beside a vast expanse of reedy swamp which opened out into stretches of clear water. Although neither Gnomer nor Rouse noticed it, something was feeding on the swamp reeds. Very little disturbance was noticeable in the reeds; in the open stretch of water beside the reeds an occasional ripple seemed to appear. Jongor, his hands untied so he could gnaw on a chunk of succulent wild pig which Gnomer had shot during the day, was very much aware of the ripple in the water

MOVING forward, he stumbled and fell. Under ordinary circum-

and that something was feeding on the reeds.

He was also aware that on his left wrist a gray crystal mottled with curious veins of light seemed to glint at him. For a moment, he stopped eating, then he continued without interruption. Now his gaze was concentrated entirely on the crystal.

A MINUTE passed. Down by the reeds something poked into the air, something that looked like the snout of a gigantic snake, something that seemed to be trying to smell or to feel a vibration in either the air or in some other medium. Neither Gnomer nor Rouse noticed it. If Jongor was aware of it, he gave no sign. But his gaze did not shift or move from the crystal on his left wrist.

It was a curious crystal. The stone itself was gray. Moving through it were strange veins of light. The stone was set in a dull yellow metal. If either Gnomer or Rouse had examined the setting, they would have become wildly excited—the setting was gold. The band that circled Jongor's wrist was also gold.

Suddenly a sound rent the air about them. The object in the water shook its gigantic head and started to move. A split second later, the ripple had enlarged. What at first glance appeared to be a small island suddenly emerged from the water beside the reed bed.

Gnomer and Rouse leaped to their feet.

The island in the water was moving toward the shore. The general effect was that of a submarine with a projecting periscope.

"Is that a sub?" Rouse gasped.

"It can't be a submarine. There couldn't be a sub in this place."

The creature came to shore. Water sprayed away from it like a tidal wave. The sound was that of some vast

pump in operation as the gigantic creature heaved and lifted itself up from the muddy bottom of the lake. It crashed through the fringe of shrubs at the water's edge and stood there, a creature out of Earth's long-gone past.

"A—a—a dinosaur!" Gnomer gasped in horror, recognizing the creature. This was one of the vegetation-eating dinosaurs, one of the lumbering monsters that usually fed from lakes or streams because the vast bulk of its body needed support from water. Not that these dinosaurs could not walk on land—they could, for long periods, but they were generally more comfortable in the water.

There were other, entirely different, kinds of dinosaurs in Lost Land—the meat-eaters, the terrible thunder lizards, creatures that could gobble down a whole deer in a single gulp and still be hungry.

Although dinosaurs, or "dinos", as he called them, had been perfectly familiar to Jongor since his childhood, neither Gnomer nor Rouse had ever seen such a creature nor had any intimation that dinosaurs still existed in Lost Land. For a moment they stood frozen, unable to move, at the sight of the monster.

THE DINO twisted its long neck, moving its head as if it were testing the wind, trying to smell something.

A low sound, like a moan, came from its lips. It began to move.

"It's coming toward us!" Rouse whispered.

Gnomer threw up his rifle, fired. The sharp spiteful crack of the gun rang through Lost Land.

The bullet struck the dinosaur and was lost in that mountain of flesh.

"You might as well shoot an elephant with a pop-gun!" Rouse exploded. "I'm getting out of here." The last words were flung back over his shoul-

der as he started to flee.

Gnomer had stronger nerves, a harder courage. He stood facing the charge of the monstrous beast. The rifle in his hands rang out again. Then, with the dinosaur almost on top of him, he turned and ran.

As he turned, he caught a glimpse of Jongor, still squatting by the fire. If Jongor even knew that the dinosaur existed, he gave no indication of it.

"Hey! Get the hell out of here!" Gnomer shouted.

Still Jongor did not move.

"Come on," Rouse yelled. "Don't stand around to argue. If that dinosaur eats him up, it's his business."

Both men ran. To their eternal relief, the dinosaur did not follow them. Instead, it veered toward Jongor. They stopped, turned. Each expected to see Jongor trampled to the ground under the monstrous padded feet of the animal.

The dinosaur came up to Jongor and stopped. The long neck bent downward. Jongor went up it like a squirrel going up a tree. He settled himself high on the massive fore shoulders of the beast. His voice lifted: "Ho, little one. Give those two creatures something to think about. Get them, little one. After them!"

Snorting, the dinosaur turned toward the two men, began its lumbering gallop.

"My God! He's riding that thing."

"He's not only riding it, he has it under control!"

For a split second, the two men stared, open-mouthed. A dinosaur was the last thing on earth either one of them had ever expected to see. And now, not only to see one, but to see the strange human whom they had captured climb up on the back of this dinosaur and direct it toward them, was more than human nerves could stand.

Both men ran like fools being

chased by the devil. Behind them came the thunder of heavy feet, the crash of breaking brush, the moaning whine of the monster out of the lake. Behind them also came a mighty human voice, shouting: "Chase them, little one. Give them hell. Show them who is boss in Lost Land!"

ANSWERING the human voice came the moan of the dinosaur. Both Gnomer and Rouse were utterly certain that their end had come. They ran as perhaps no two men had ever run before in all the history of the world.

To Jongor, on the back of the dinosaur, this was fun. The two men were getting exactly what they had coming to them. They were the first two humans he had ever met, except for his father and mother. When he had gone to them in friendship, they had tricked him. But he had no intention of killing them. When the dinosaur had chased them far enough, he called off the mighty beast.

"Come, little one, we must go back now and recover my own weapons."

Reluctantly the dinosaur gave up the chase, turned in the direction of the place where the two men had captured Jongor and where he had left his bow and his spear. He wanted his weapons back, as quickly as possible.

To survive in Lost Land without weapons was a gamble that only a fool would take.

The great beast moved easily through the night. Morning had arrived before they reached the place where Gnomer and Rouse had captured Jongor. He retrieved his spear, the great bow, the quiver of arrows, the knife and belt.

"Go back to your swamp, little one," he spoke softly to the dinosaur.

The creature moaned and headed toward the nearest water, where it



To Jongor, riding the dinosaur, this was fun. Especially the way the two men scurried off

launched itself like a battleship going down the ways. Jongor, aware of the pangs in his own stomach, turned to the hunt. After he had killed and had eaten, he decided he would return to his own home, the great cave where he had lived with his parents. It was the only home he had ever known.

He made his way leisurely across Lost Land. Off to his left something moved—a human figure.

His keen eyes caught the moving figure the instant it came into sight.

"Another human," he thought. "Well, this time I won't be tricked. I'll stay away from that kind of animal!"

His experience with Goomer and Rouse had given him a hearty distaste for all humans.

He saw the human wave at him, try to attract his attention. He moved quietly away.

A SPITTING snarl answered Ann Hunter's scream. A paw groped toward her again.

As it touched her, she reached upward with both hands and took a firm grip on a limb above her. She swung herself from it. With both feet, she smashed blindly at the Murto below her. She felt her feet strike flesh.

"Wow!" The yell came from the startled Murto as she kicked him. All the strength in her legs and the weight of her swinging body was back of the blow. It caught the Murto in the face and he lost his grip on the tree and fell.

Then, before Ann had even begun to realize what was happening, she felt her hands slip, knew that she was falling too. She plummeted downward through the darkness.

Fortunately she hit directly on top of the Murto. "Alan," she shouted as she fell. There was no answer.

She scrambled to her feet. "Alan!"

There was no answer except the heavy breathing of the Murto and the night sounds of the jungle.

Dazed, shocked, in the grip of growing terror, she started to run. She heard the Murto get to his feet and come stumbling after her. The sound added to the panic in her.

"Yi, yi, yi!" the Murto yelled, behind her. She had the impression that these creatures could probably see in the dark, or at least they could see better than she could. She found her way out of the grove into an open space and ran as she had never run before. If there were other dangers in Lost Land, they were as nothing in comparison to the threat behind her.

When she could run no longer, she stopped. Panting for breath, she listened. There were noises in the night. Noises coming from the right were unquestionably being made by Umber. She was still being followed!

She ran again, but this time silently. An hour later, she knew she had lost the Murto. Turning, she began a cautious retracing of her steps.

"I've got to find Alan. He may be hurt. He may need help."

DESPERATELY, she tried to find her way. Two hours later, she faced the truth: she was lost.

Off somewhere in the distance a lion coughed, adding to her terror.

Dawn found her crouching in a tree.

With the coming of light, she descended to the ground and again tried to retrace her steps, but without success. She was hopelessly lost in a land of swamp and wilderness.

For two days she wandered around—terrorized at the slightest sound—sleeping crouched in a tree during the night—eating only the fruits and berries that Jongor had taught her were safe to eat. One night she dreamed that she was fleeing from giant hands

pursuing her. The ground was littered with huge skulls over which the horse she was riding stumbled. Then she was enveloped in the two monstrous hands and lifted, together with her horse, to a looming face. As the maniacal eyes peered more closely at her, she screamed and awakened with a horrible shudder. The sound traveled through the night—and was echoed and re-echoed in the howlings of jungle animals. She spent the rest of the night huddled wide-awake in a tree in a paroxysm of terror.

The thought of Jongor was constantly in her mind. She was firmly convinced that sooner or later Jongor would find her. He was an expert tracker. No matter where she went, he could follow her trail. The thought soothed and sustained her. She would be all right. Jongor would find her. Deep in her heart she knew she loved this gray-eyed giant of Lost Land.

Ahead of her a figure moved. At sight of it, she felt a sudden thrill shoot through her body.

"Jongor!" she screamed. Jongor was here! He had found her. Her heart jumped until she thought it would leap from her breast. She ran forward.

Jongor turned, looked toward her. He saw her, she knew he saw her. Now all her troubles were over, now she would be safe not only from the real terrors of Lost Land but from the horror of being lost.

"Jongor!"

She ran toward him. For a second, he stood staring at her, then he slid out of sight like a ghost vanishing in the wind.

Appalled, Ann Hunter stopped. She knew he had seen her. Why hadn't he come to her? Why had he run away? Echoing the pounding of her heart, questions pounded through her mind.

"Jongor!" she called again. Then, in a weaker voice, "Jongor."

Had she seen someone else? That was not possible. No matter where she saw Jongor, she would know him.

OFF SOMEWHERE behind her, she caught a whisper of sound, an excited yapping. Ignoring it, she ran forward to the place where she had seen Jongor. There, in a fresh spot of ground, she found footprints! Proof that she had not been mistaken!

"Jongor!" There was no answer.

Tears came then, unashamed tears. She sank to the ground, crying. In her wretched state, she did not see the Murto approach. They were swarming all over her before she even knew they were near.

"See, I have found her!" Umber yelled. He was very happy. This was quite an accomplishment, and for it he undoubtedly would have a big reward from Great Orbo, the leader.

"I hope you choke on your own stupid tongue!" she said to him as they led her away.

Umber grinned. He was in too good a humor to pay any attention to such remarks.

"Look!" a Murto shouted. "The great man Jongor, he has been here!"

The Murto had discovered the footprints in the soft ground. The sight excited them greatly. They clustered in a group, eyeing the surrounding country. For Jongor they had the greatest respect, and the greatest hate.

"We will do this," Orbo decided. "We have his girl. When we leave, he will follow us, try to rescue her. We will be on the watch for him. This time we will get him."

The thought of capturing or killing Jongor excited Orbo greatly. He strutted back and forth, his tail jumping and curling, his chest thrust out as though the job had already been accomplished and he, personally, had done it.

From the depths of misery, Ann Hunter listened to this talk. Deep in her heart she was certain that this was one ambush that would not work. Jongor would not follow her, he would not try to save her. At the thought, the misery in her again dissolved in tears.

Taking the girl with them, and very much alert for Jongor, the band of Murtos moved away.

FROM THE concealment of a grove of trees, Jongor watched the girl try to find him. The gray ghost in his mind had struggled hard to reach the surface. For an instant, it seemed to him that he knew this woman. Or was she a woman? How did he know that? He had known only one woman in his life—his mother.

He stared at Ann, his brow wrinkled. Restless urges moved in him. Something told him to go to her, to help her, that she needed him badly. But strong in him was the memory of the two men, Gnomer and Rouse, who had tricked and betrayed him. If the first humans he had ever met had done this to him, how did he know that this woman would not do the same thing? Or maybe worse?

Yet, there was something about her. . . . He was uncomfortable, worried, and he did not know why.

He saw the Murtos grab her. At sight of them, anger rose in him. He knew the Murtos all right, had known them since childhood. There was only one creature in all of Lost Land that he hated worse than the Murtos, and that was a Tero. The Teros had killed his mother. He saw the Murtos discover his tracks, saw their excitement at the sight. They did not attempt to follow him. They knew better than that! He watched them take the girl away.

He shrugged. What was it to him

what they did with this woman? Turning, he resumed his course toward the great cave where he had spent his childhood. The woman was nothing to him.

But she had called his name! She had called out again and again, "Jongor!" How had she known who he was?

At the realization that this woman had called him by name, the ghost moving through his mind surged to the surface. It brought with it all his memory. He remembered now the savage blow that had struck his head as he tried to flee from the giant and the Murtos, he remembered also this girl and her brother.

"Ann Hunter!" The words were choked out of his lips. He remembered now who this girl was and what she meant to him.

The transformation that took place in Jongor of Lost Land in this moment would have startled any observer.

A shudder passed through his body. His head lifted, came up. He had been a little stooped, as though the weight of the world rested on his shoulders. But now the stoop was gone, and Jongor stood erect, angry and aroused.

THE MURTOS had not gone a mile before an excited clamor sounded ahead of them. The clamor came from another group of the monkey-men who had been left here while a small party under the leadership of Great Orbo sought the missing girl.

"It is our people," Great Orbo said, listening to the clamor.

"But what are they so excited about?" Umber questioned.

"How do I know? Nobody would ask a question like that except a fool," Orbo growled. "We will go and see."

They went forward. As soon as the second group of Murtos came into sight, it was immediately obvious why

they were so excited. Two white men were with them.

"Two more humans!" Great Orbo said. "Where did they come from?"

"Nobody but—" Umber started to say, then hastily changed his mind. Looking at his chief's bulk and knowing Orbo's hasty temper, Umber decided it would not be wise to say that only a fool would ask such a question.

Two members of the group came running to meet them. "Two humans came to us," they explained. "By signs, they said they wanted to be friends."

"And you let them approach you?" Orbo growled.

"They made signs of friendship. And besides, they have guns."

The last word was spoken with awe. The Murtos had some science from the Murians, some of the old-time equipment was still in place, but it was a science that the present generation did not begin to understand or to use. Clubs and spears were their limit in the way of weapons. But they knew about guns. Other humans who had penetrated Lost Land had had guns.

"Oh, guns!" Orbo said. This was a weapon he respected. "Let them approach me and let them talk. But be ready to strike them if they attempt to use their guns."

Urged, the two white men came close. Expressions of surprise showed on their faces when they saw Ann Hunter.

"A white woman!" Rouse spoke. His eyes gleamed.

"We don't have any time for that now!" Gnomer snarled. "Get it out of your mind. These monkeys are Murtos, I tell you. They're the hunch we're looking for. We've found them." Something of triumph showed on Gnomer's face as he spoke, as though some cherished dream were about to come true.

"What the hell good it's doing us to find 'em when we can't talk to 'em, I don't see," Rouse answered.

"Well, maybe..." Gnomer's eyes came to rest on the girl. She was with the Murtos, perhaps she could speak their language. "I beg your pardon, Miss—" Speaking to Ann Hunter, Gnomer put on his best manners.

"Oh, all right," the girl said. Listless and indifferent, she translated the conversation between Great Orbo and the man whose name was Gnomer.

"What are you doing here?" Great Orbo demanded, eyeing the rifles.

"In the great world outside, we have heard of the might of the Murtos," Gnomer answered. "We have come to be with them, to help them, to live with them."

"Ho," Orbo answered, pleased in spite of himself but wary, too. "Why do you want to come and live with us?"

"Because we want to help you," Gnomer answered. He spoke convincingly.

"Will you help us do something right now?" Orbo questioned.

"Anything," Gnomer said. "Name it and we will do it if it is in our power."

"Good!" Great Orbo answered. Again he was becoming excited, walking up and down, his tail snapping in angry jerks as he planned this enterprise. "There is following us, or there soon will be following us, another of you humans. We will set an ambush. We want you to take your guns..." Orbo glanced thoughtfully at the two rifles the men carried—"...and shoot this human."

"Of course," Gnomer answered promptly. "Who is this man?"

"Jongor!" Great Orbo answered. Enraged at even the thought of his enemy, the Murto began to jump up and down. "Shoot him and you shall have your choice of everything the

Murtos possess. But he sure you only wound him. I want to personally finish him off with this!" Fiercely he pounded on the ground with his club to illustrate his meaning.

IN ANN HUNTER, a feeling of horror arose. She watched them lay the ambush for Jongor. Great Orbo considered himself an expert in laying ambushes, and he laid this one with especial care. First, the entire group went forward through a narrow gap between two hills. Then they swerved to the right and stopped. Gnomer and Rouse with their rifles were posted on the hillside. Anyone following the trail of the Murtos would have to come through the gap. Anyone who came through the gap would fall before the lead-jacketed slugs of the high-powered rifles.

Great Orbo could hardly conceal his excitement. Now he had humans, with guns, fighting on his side. He was voluble with his promises of what he would do for Gnomer and Rouse as soon as Jongor was dead. "But remember to aim low," he cautioned them. "Hit him in the legs, if you can. So he can't run." He hefted the club he carried, indicating what he would do with it.

"How far do we dare trust this character?" Rouse questioned, in English. "No, dammit, don't tell him what we're saying!" This last was shouted at Ann Hunter as she automatically started to put the English words into the Murto language.

"We can trust him as long as we have these," Gnomer answered. He patted the stock of his rifle.

The group waited on the hillside. Far off in a swamp a hull alligator belled. Somewhere near them a bird was singing. Ann Hunter watched in silence. She was certain this ambush would catch nothing. Jongor would not come to rescue her. He had had

his chance and he had turned away.

"Shhh! There he comes!"

At the sound of the whisper, the girl lifted her eyes. Down there in the gap was—Jongor! He had not deserted her! He was following the Murtos, trying to rescue her!

And she had let him be led into a death trap!

At the thought, her heart almost stopped beating. She saw Gnomer and Rouse raise their rifles, heard Gnomer's terse comment: "Remember, we're shooting down hill. Aim low because of that."

"Sure," Rouse answered. His eyes went along the sights of the rifle. The girl saw his finger tighten on the trigger.

Not until then was she able to move.

The scream that ripped from her throat set the echoes ringing between the two hills.

Following the scream came the sharp hard spat of the two rifles firing in the same split second.

Ann Hunter faced the wrath of the two humans and of Orbo and UMBER!

IN ENTERING the gap between the two hills, Jongor was well aware that he might be running into a Murto ambush. Anger drove him. And more than anger. Ann Hunter was in trouble, she needed help desperately. Jongor had never failed to heed the call for help from a friend. Ordinarily, he would have moved a little more cautiously on the trail, but ordinary caution was cast to the winds by the anger driving him. Also, for the average Murto ambush he had only contempt. He had been ambushed by Murtos before now. If there was an ambush waiting for him here, let the Murtos be the ones to look out!

The sudden, totally unexpected scream of the girl came to his ears!

Jongor did not have to take time

to think. He knew, without quite knowing how he knew it, that this was Ann Hunter screaming, that the scream was a warning to him, and he also guessed, in the split second of time he had available, that she was not screaming to warn him of an average Murto amoussh. No! More than that was involved here.

He threw himself flat on the ground.

Sounds above his head like the harsh popping of angry hornets told him what he was up against. Rifle bullets! They howled past him, hit the hillside behind him, bounced off with the noise of screaming devils.

Rifles in the hands of Murtos! The very thought dazed him. A second after he had it, he knew it was wrong. More than Murtos were up there on that hillside. He did not attempt to rise to his feet. Instead he rolled. The stave of the bow and the quiver of arrows impeded his progress. The rifle bullets that now were whipping around him made him move faster. Death rode on those bullets and he knew it. He rolled, crawled, reached a shoulder of the hill and slid behind it, the last rifle bullet snapping into the dirt behind him.

A second later, he was gone. Above him, men were running along the slope of the hill trying to catch another sight of him. He knew they would be there. They didn't get that second sight.

BECAUSE her scream had warned Jongor, Ann Hunter first thought that the Murtos would kill her on the spot. Great Orbo rushed at her, his fanged mouth agape, his club lifted. She thought he fully intended to do to her what he had wanted to do to Jongor, knock her brains out.

She made no attempt to resist.

Perhaps this one fact saved her

If she had tried to dodge, tried to run, if she had even spoken to Orbo or lifted a hand, he would have killed her. She continued sitting down; she merely lifted her eyes and looked at him. She faced a fanged mouth roaring at her, an enraged beast that looked like a gorilla. She faced a heavy club big enough to dash out her brains at one blow. She faced an enraged beast and death itself without flinching.

Orbo danced around her in a circle, then drew back. Gnomer, glancing over his shoulder at her, was terribly impressed at the sight. "That girl has courage!" he thought.

Later, when the rifles stopped and the men went running along the hill trying to get another shot at Jongor, she knew she had saved him. Her heart leaped at the thought! Then the men were coming back, arguing with each other.

"I tell you I winged him, my last slug nicked him."

"Hell, you couldn't hit a sitting elephant," Gnomer answered in a rage.

THE GROUP of Murtos, accompanied by Gnomer, Rouse and Ann Hunter, moved westward again. Calazao, she noted, was no longer with them. She did not know what had happened to the giant and did not care. Alan was not with them either. She asked Umber what had happened to her brother, got a surly grunt for an answer. She decided, the grief rising in her heart, that Alan was probably dead. She watched the backward trail for Jongor.

"He will not come to you again," Umber told her, with relish. "Why don't you forget him? Why don't you choose me instead?" Umber, his bushy tail waving in the air, strutted back and forth beside her. He flexed his

muscles to show how strong and powerful he was.

"You stay away from me or I'll tell Great Orbo," the girl said.

"Huh! Him!" Umber sneered. But he looked hastily in the direction of his chief, saw that Orbo was not within hearing range. "Someday I will cut his throat. Then I will be chief!" Again he began to strut. "Then you will be mine."

"I'll die first," Ann Hunter answered.

The next day, still without seeing anything of Jongor, they reached the city of the Murtos.

It sat in a valley between the hills. Back of it was a vast cliff from which, in ancient days, the Murian colonists from which this group was descended had mined gold. To the left a swamp camp up almost to the edge of the city.

Ann Hunter had always felt that to call this place a city was to misuse the word. Once it had been a city. But that had been long in the past. Once it had been protected by a great wall, but the wall was now broken, partly as a result of the passage of time and partly by Jongor's efforts when Ann Hunter had been held prisoner here. She saw that no effort had been made to repair the break in the wall.

The city was made up of stone houses that seemed almost as old as the hills which surrounded it. Many of the houses were only heaps of stone now. In what had once been broad streets, trees were growing. Just looking at this place would remove any doubt in the mind of a competent observer that the Murtos were also on their way back to the jungle. As the city had gone back, so had the people.

At the sight of the city, Gnomer and Rouse seemed both excited and

depressed.

"It sure doesn't look like much," Rouse said.

"The aerial maps were right," Gnomer answered. "The city is here. Maybe the things we are looking for are here, too."

"What aerial maps?" Ann Hunter questioned.

The two men glanced quickly at her and fell silent.

"Forget we said anything," Gnomer spoke.

"Aw, what the hell if she did hear?" Rouse interjected. "She'll never be able to do anything about it!"

An excited babble of sound burst from the Murtos. They were gesturing toward the hill on the right. Rising above the babble of their voices was another sound—the growing thunder of heavy hoofs.

"My God!" Rouse gasped. "Look at that!"

COMING down the slope of the hill, charging straight toward the group, were three dinosaurs. These were not the vegetation-eating specimens that Gnomer and Rouse had encountered earlier. These were the meat eaters, the terrible thunder dragons of antiquity. Fanged mouths a yard wide gaped open, from distended throats shrill screams shocked the air.

At the sight, the band of Murtos instantly broke. They went straight down the slope toward the city at a dead run. Ann Hunter caught a dazed glimpse of Great Orbo. Orbo was not only the leader of the Murtos in battle, he was also their leader in running. He led the pack. Umber was not far behind him.

The click of the safety of a rifle caught her attention.

But something else caught her attention: an object on the back of the leading dinosaur. Clinging ^{etc.} to the

scaled back, riding like a cowboy bent low in the saddle, was a human.

"Jongor!" Ann Hunter screamed. The figure crouching on the back of the leading dinosaur could be no one else on earth but Jongor of Lost Land. Her heart leaped at the sight. Then, as Gnomer brought his rifle to his shoulder, she remembered the click she had just heard.

She saw Gnomer's gaze go along the sights of the gun.

"Stop it!" Like an enraged tigress, she threw herself at the man. The gun exploded as Gnomer was knocked to the side by the fury of her attack.

"Damn it, girl!"

Clawing, scratching, biting, kicking, she clung to him. If she could hold him for minutes, Jongor would be here.

"You little fool—"

She got both arms around his neck, clasped her legs around his middle and locked them behind his back. It was a position from which she could not be easily dislodged. Indeed, she had no intention of being dislodged.

"Rouse—"

As Gnomer spoke, she felt Rouse grab her hair. He yanked backward. Agony shot through her scalp. Rouse hit her with his fist, hit her savagely on the side of her head. Her grip on Gnomer was knocked loose.

Falling, as she tried to get to her feet, she heard the rifle roar. The first shot missed. Her heart leaped at the thought. The thunder of dinosaur hoofs was growing louder. The shrill screams of the mighty saurians rang in her ears. The rifle roared again.

"Got him!" Gnomer spoke.

THE GIRL had to force herself to turn to look. One glance was sufficient. The person on the back of the dinosaur had slid to one side, was clinging desperately. Gnomer dropped to one knee, aimed carefully. The

rifle spoke again.

The figure on the dinosaur jumped at the impact of the heavy bullet. The figure went to the ground and was obviously smashed under the thundering feet that followed the first dino. Ann Hunter stared at the charging monsters. She knew only too well what would happen to a person caught beneath those pounding feet. The stampede of a herd of cattle would be mild in comparison. A person might survive a bullet wound, but nobody who ever lived would survive both a bullet wound and the effect of being crushed beneath those mighty feet.

She had a mental picture of Jongor's body, of what it looked like now that it had been trampled into the ground, all gory, broken, battered flesh.

"Hey, them damned things are still coming!" Rouse spoke.

"They ought not to be still coming," Gnomer spoke. "I got Jongor. I saw him fall—"

"But they are!"

There was no disputing the fact. Whether the continuation of the charge was accidental, whether the dinosaurs were merely continuing in the same direction they had started, there was no way to tell. But coming they were.

"Come on, let's get out of here!" Rouse shouted.

Turning, he started to follow the Murto's.

He stopped almost as quickly as he started. Barring his path, advancing toward him, was Jongor.

JONGOR'S plan had been simple. Controlling the dinosaurs, he had brought them down the hill in a charge, using the crystal device that had been developed by the ancient Murians. He had stuffed a straw figure and had tied it on to the back of the leading dino.

He had known the Murtos would run. He had also expected the two men to run. In the confusion, he had expected to snatch up Ann, to swing both himself and Ann on the back of the leading dino, and make a clean getaway.

The plan ought to have worked. It was simple, apparently foolproof. But the two humans had not run as he had expected. He had been left in the position of taking quick, desperate action. He thought he could rush the two men from behind. One blow from the heavy spear would take care of one of them. Before the second knew what was happening, it would be too late to do anything about it.

The plan was good. Again, it ought to have worked. And it would have worked, if Rouse had not turned at exactly the wrong moment.

Even after Rouse had turned, Jongor could still have taken action. But Gnomer turned, too. Jongor was expecting both of them to shoot at him. Gnomer didn't.

"Stop!" Gnomer yelled. He pointed the muzzle of his rifle at Ann Hunter. "Stop—or I'll shoot her."

Jongor stopped in mid-stride. In the face of that threat, there was no other action he could take.

The thunder of the charge of the approaching dinosaurs was growing louder.

"Turn 'em aside, send 'em in some other direction, or I'll shoot her!" Gnomer ordered.

The man's face was granite hard. He meant every word he said. Jongor knew that the slightest hesitation on his part would sign the death sentence for Ann Hunter.

His gaze dropped down to the crystal on his left wrist. This device was old, but it still worked. Some forgotten, long-gone Murian scientist had devised this crystal. The Murian who had made it had been a genius of the

highest order. Out through it flowed thought waves. Somehow they reached the brains of the dinosaurs.

The beasts swerved. They thundered past fifty yards to the right. Rouse, sweat dripping from his face, stared at them in panic-stricken apprehension. Gnomer never turned an eye to look in their direction. He kept his gaze focused on Jongor. Every so often, his eyes flicked back to Ann Hunter. The muzzle of his rifle never ceased covering the girl.

ONLY WHEN the dinosaurs had charged after the fleeing Murtos did Gnomer speak to Rouse: "Have him drop his weapons. Then tie his hands behind his back."

Again Jongor was forced to submit to this indignity.

"I want to know how you control those dinosaurs," Gnomer demanded.

"With my mind," Jongor answered, shrugging.

"What kind of an idiot are you?" Rouse said. "Nobody can control an animal just by using his mind."

Again Jongor shrugged. "Then believe what you wish," he said indifferently. He had recognized that the two men were in awe of him, and determined to use this to his advantage.

"Walk ahead of us, you and that girl. And don't try any more funny business." Gnomer's voice carried the tones of deadly threat.

Jongor and Ann Hunter obeyed. Neither knew what waited for them in the city, but each could guess. In short, terse whispers he told Ann what had happened to him. "For days I did not remember what had happened to me."

"Then you didn't desert me," Ann answered. "I'm so glad." The thought that he had refused to help her had been a gnawing canker in her heart. Now she knew the truth. In that moment, she completely forgot the dan-

ger around them. Jongor was here with her. Jongor could save her and himself!

They were marched down into the city. The frightened Murto appeared, gesturing with clubs. Now that the time of danger was past, they were very brave. Jongor ignored them. Ann Hunter acted as if she did not see them.

"Lock them up in the old mines!" Great Orbo decided. "Soon we shall decide what to do with them."

THE TWO were taken into the old mine workings in the cliff. There they were thrown into a small cell with a barred door. A single Murto, with an unusually large club and a face that was constantly drawn up into a fighting snarl, was set to guard them. He spent most of his time grimacing through the bars of the heavy door and promising what he would do if they stuck as much as a nose out of their cell.

"Wait till Jongor gets to you," Ann said spiritedly.

"Who is Jongor?" the Murto answered, brandishing his club and showing his fangs. Jongor walked to the barred door.

"Boo!" he yelled.

As if he had been attacked, the startled Murto leaped backward. Then, realizing Jongor was safely behind bars, he recovered his courage. Pounding his club against the door, he yelled, "Come out here and I'll show you what I can do."

"He is very brave when he is out there and you are in here," the girl taunted.

"It would be funny if it were not so serious," Jongor answered. Although he did not admit it to Ann, he knew that only the greatest stroke of luck would get them out of this place alive.

They were two people kidding each

other. Each kept locked in his heart the knowledge that only death was waiting for them here.

A day passed, two days. They saw only the guard with the big club. Neither Gnomer nor Rouse came near them.

"What are they waiting for?" Ann wondered aloud, then was instantly sorry she had spoken.

"I don't know," Jongor answered. "But they're up to something, you can bet on that. And it's not something that will be to our benefit. Listen!" he said.

From somewhere in the caverns, seemingly rising from the very depths of hell itself, came a deep rumble, a dull throbbing roar of sound that shook the solid stone floor on which they were standing.

"What's that?" Ann asked.

"I don't know."

The Murto guard was frightened. He came close to the door.

"It is the great god of the lower caverns," the guard spoke. "I have never heard his voice before. No living Murto has ever heard this voice. But there are stories...." The Murto shivered in fear. He stood licking his lips and trembling.

THE SOUND died into silence, then came again, a throbbing roar that shook the entire mountain. Bits of rock, loosened from the walls and the ceilings, fell downward, striking with soft thuds that were hardly noticeable in the vaster roar coming from somewhere below. Again it died into a vast silence.

"I don't like that sound," Ann Hunter whispered. "I don't like it a bit."

Jongor put his arm around her shoulder and she crept closer to him. In the shelter of that mighty arm, she found protection.

"Tell me more about the great god,"

Jongor said to the Murto guard.

"I do not know much except that when the great god calls—and he has called twice—a sacrifice must be made ready."

"A sacrifice?" Ann whispered. She looked up at Jongor. He pressed her closer to him, noticed that she was trembling. Neither uttered the fear that was rising in their hearts.

The Murto guard shivered and drew even to the metal grill of the door, as if he hungered for the companionship of the prisoners he had been set to guard. Quietly Jongor slipped his arm from Ann's shoulder.

His hands shot out. They went through the bars, got the Murto guard by the neck, jerked him hard against the metal grill.

"Ugh!" the guard gasped. He had meant the sound to be a scream, but fingers tighter than iron bands were clamped around his throat. He jerked, twisted, arched his body like a bow, got one leg up and shoved backward against the bars of the door.

Still the fingers held.

Dropping his club, the Murto lifted both arms, caught the hands that were holding him, tried to jerk them loose. There was tremendous strength in his hairy arms. Jongor felt sweat begin to pop out on him. On his bare back, the muscles stood out as long ridges in the flesh.

"Hold him, Jongor!" Ann gasped. "I'll shove the bar out of its sockets!" "Good girl!"

The door was locked on the outside by a heavy wooden bar which fitted into metal sockets. Jongor caught a glimpse of Ann shoving her hands through the grill and shoving hard against the bar. The weight of the Murto was against the door. She could not move the bar.

"I can't make it."

"Let it go then. I'll have this monkey in just a minute."

Already the struggles of the guard had weakened. Suddenly the hands stopped clawing at Jongor's arms. The heavy body sagged. Jongor released his grip. The Murto went down. A split second later, Jongor had reached through the grill and had lifted the bar.

THE DOOR swung open. They were free! Jongor snatched the club of the fallen Murto. It was better than no weapon. "Come on, Ann, let's get out of here!"

"Where in the hell do you think you're going!" a heavy voice grated.

Jongor and Ann stopped. Coming toward them was Gnomer and Rouse. Great Orbo and Umber were following the two humans. Gnomer had an air of elation about him, as if he had just achieved the aim of his whole life. Rouse looked worried. The two rifles came up instantly.

"Ready to get away, eh?" Gnomer said. "Lucky we came along just when we did. It would have disappointed Great Orbo if you two had escaped. And we wouldn't want to disappoint Orbo, would we?"

Gnomer was having fun. His sort of fun! But the rifles that he and Rouse held were steady and ready. There was no arguing with guns.

"Drop the club," Gnomer ordered.

Slowly, Jongor obeyed. "Keep your chin up," he whispered to Ann. "We're not licked yet."

"One on each side of them. Hold them tight. I'll have the head of the Murto who lets them escape!" Great Orbo yelled.

With a powerful Murto firmly gripping each arm, Ann and Jongor were led away. When the march was over, they were standing on a ledge overlooking a vast excavation.

"It's a mining shaft of the ancient Murtos," Jongor whispered to Ann.

The scene before their eyes was that

of a colossal excavation. A tremendous shaft rose far above them. Below them, a distance of fifty feet away, the bottom was visible. Flaring torches, set in sockets along the walls, shed a wan illumination over the entire scene.

"What is that down there at the bottom?" Ann spoke.

In the bottom of the vast pit was a machine of some kind. But what kind? Hooded and covered, all that was visible was a giant snout, that emerged from the machine and pointed downward to the rocky floor. Under the flare of the torches, it looked like some prehistoric monster out of Earth's long-dead past.

"I don't know what it is," Jongor answered, "I've never been here before. I did not know this pit existed." He could sense deep uneasiness amounting almost to terror arising in Ann.

THE LEDGE on which he and the girl were standing circled the entire pit. Murtos were appearing from everywhere and were taking their places on the ledge. An air of eagerness pervaded the entire throng.

"They're getting ready to do something," Ann whispered. Her voice was shaky and tremulous with rising fear. "W—what are they going to do?"

Jongor shook his head and did not answer. He had a grim idea of what the Murtos were preparing to do, but it was an idea he did not intend to reveal to Ann. Down below, two men emerged from an opening in the wall of the shaft and made their way toward the machine.

Gnomer and Rouse!

Gnomer climbed a ladder to the top of the machine, lifted a hood, and slipped into a seat thus revealed. Levers were on both sides of the seat. Gnomer moved one of the levers. In

response, the long tube projecting from the machine began to move. A soft glow of light sprang from it. The machine throbbled softly, a grumble resembling the roar they had heard before, but much lower in volume.

As if in answer to the roar from the machine, a soft moan came from the Murtos watching on the ledge. A shudder passed over the entire group, a ripple of emotional movement. The entire tribe of Murtos was out on the ledge.

To them, this was obviously a great event, something that the whole tribe should witness. Jongor had the impression that what happened here would be told for generations among the Murtos.

The projecting tube of the machine came to a halt. The light from it, pouring downward, illuminated a heavy square of black stone. Pitted and eroded, the stone was old, but still visible on it were dark stains of some kind.

As the light illuminated and came to rest on the stone, the Murtos sobbed, a soft convulsive sound that had in it elements of both hunger and terror, hunger for a sight they were about to see, terror because of that sight. The sound coming from the Murtos was weird and eerie. There was pain in it, and ecstasy of a hidden kind. A shudder seemed to pass along the entire circle of watching monkey-men.

DOWN BELOW, Rouse was leaving the machine. He disappeared into an opening in the wall, then reappeared on the ledge, talking to Great Orbo.

"Ready up above!" the Murto chief yelled.

An answer came from somewhere in the darkness over them. "Re—ady!" A monotonous clank began.

Rouse came along the ledge to Jon-

gor and Ann. Sweat dripped from his three-day growth of whiskers. His eyes were apologetic. "These monkeys got funny ideas," he said.

"I know," Jongor answered.

"I just wanted you to know it ain't my idea," Rouse said. "I didn't have any part of it." As if to emphasize his meaning, he shook his head vigorously. "No part at all. I even tried to talk 'em out of it."

"Talk them out of what?" Ann spoke sharply. A terror that she could no longer control was rising in her voice.

"Well, nothing," Rouse said uncomfortably. Overhead, the monotonous clanking continued. The Murtos were looking upward. A soft hum of apprehension went through their ranks.

"What do you mean, you tried to talk them out of what?" Ann said again.

Rouse wiped at the sweat drenching his beard, twisting his head sideways and brushing it against his shirt in a furtive gesture. The more he wiped the sweat away, the more it seemed to appear.

A Murto carrying leather thongs was coming along the ledge. His eyes were on Ann and Jongor. He held the thongs aloft for all the Murtos to see. Rouse wiped more sweat from his face.

"They kinda think that machine down there is a god," he said. "Seems like they haven't known how to find it for generations. But they still had memories that it had once existed, stories that they had heard from their folks or something...."

"A god?" Aon whispered. The terror rising in her heart was being replaced by horror. If she had had any doubt before, she had none now. There was only one way the Murtos placated their gods.

"Yeah, that's what they think. Gnomer says it is actually a kind of ray

machine that breaks up rock. He says the old-time Murtos used it for mining. He also says that with a few changes it can be made into a death ray that will work across hundreds of miles of space—"

"What?" Aon whispered. The horror in her heart had existed because of what was going to happen to her and Jongor. Now she felt a touch of a greater horror. What happened to her and Jongor would happen later to thousands of other people, perhaps to millions. If the machine in the pit could be developed into some kind of a death ray!

ROUSE NODDED vigorously. "That's what Gnomer says. He picked up hints of it from the legends of old time Mu, also hints that this city existed here. He flew over the place, very high, and took pictures. Then made maps from the pictures. That's how we got here—"

"But the ray?" Ann asked. Now, for the first time, she saw the Murto approaching with the leather thongs, and was aware of the use to which they were to be put.

Again Rouse nodded. "Gnomer says he can peddle this thing for as many millions of dollars as he wants to ask for it. He says there are a dozen countries that will pay any price he asks." He licked his lips as if the thought of the money made him hungry. "But I didn't have anything to do with the rest of it," he added.

"What's the rest of it?" Ann asked.

"Oh, these monkeys..." Rouse's gaze was contemptuous as he swept the ranks of watching Murtos. "They figger that when something goes wrong, they gotta offer a—" He didn't finish the sentence.

A gasp had gone up from the watching Murtos. Turning, Ann saw that a length of cable with a huge hook on

the end of it had descended from the darkness above. The cable was moving slowly toward them. In the dim light, the hook loomed like a huge question mark turned upside down, a question mark which seemed to ask: which way eternity?

As she saw the hook swinging toward them, and saw again the Murto with the leather thongs making his way along the ledge, Ann suddenly realized how the hook, the thongs, the ray machine, and the huge block of black stone in the pit below were to be used.

The thongs were to tie her and Jongor to the hook. Then, one by one, they were to be swung downward and deposited on the square of black stone, helpless victims for the sacrifice.

Once these Murtos had tried to offer her as a bride to the sun.

Now they had another purpose in mind. Now she and Jongor were to be offered as sacrifices to the great god! To the disintegrator ray machine in the pit below!

NOW SHE understood the dark stains on that block of black stone. The stains were obviously ancient, but they had remained there as still visible evidence of other sacrifices that had been offered on this same black altar in the long-gone days of the hideous past of the Murtos.

What would be the effect of that disintegrator ray on human flesh?

The dark stains on the altar were visible evidence of the answer!

A tremor passed over the girl. She stifled a scream in her throat, looked at Jongor.

The giant stood quiet and impassive. He seemed to hear nothing and to see nothing. A Murto grasped each arm with hairy paws. But she could tell, from the set look on Jongor's face, that he was ready for desperate action. A little thrill of hope passed

through her at the sight. Jongor was still ready to try.

But what could he do now?

The Murto with the leather thongs had reached them. "The girl first," he said. "Tie her arms and legs!"

"EEEEEEyow!"

The scream that ripped through the vast pit seemed at first to Ann Hunter to come from her own lips. Then she knew she hadn't screamed. The ripping yell of agony and of terror had come from some other source, seemingly from up above.

Then the girl screamed in reality as she caught a glimpse of something hurtling downward.

It was a Murto. The monkey-man was falling from some ledge farther up in the pit. The huge hairy body twisted and turned as it fell. As the Murto flashed down, he screamed again. The vast pit echoed and re-echoed the sound.

The scream died in the hard thud of flesh meeting solid rock, died suddenly, and forever. Echoes following the scream caught the sound of the thud, flung it back and forth between the walls of the pit, creating the effect that not one but dozens of Murtos had died here.

The Murto with the thongs stopped moving. His mouth hung open. Through the whole group of watching monkey-men there ran a convulsive sob of terror.

THEY HAD been waiting for a sacrifice and it had come, in the form of one of their own people falling from a great height to die on the rocky floor of the cavern. They had had a sacrifice, but it had not been the one they had expected.

Nor did they expect the wild, exultant yell that came from above: "Give 'em hell, Yale!"

Ann Hunter's heart jumped. That

yell could come from only one person on earth—her brother. Her scream went echoing up the sides of the pit. "Alan!"

Simultaneously, the hook and the cable, which had stopped moving, took a quick swing toward them.

At the same split second, Jongor wrenched himself free from the grip of the Murto who had been holding him. In their startled horror at the sight of one of their own group taking the death plunge from up above, they had momentarily forgotten about Jongor. It was the last time they would ever forget anything.

Ann Hunter saw Jongor jerk free. She was not quite certain how he did it, but she had the dazed impression that he either hit or shoved both Murto guards at the same instant. They went off the ledge. She heard them scream, but she didn't hear the heavy thuds come back from below.

Jongor moved toward her. He hit, once, with his fist, at the Murto nearest to him. The monkey-man was knocked backward into Rouse. There was a spitting squall from the Murto and a yell from Rouse as both were knocked down. Jongor did not have to hit the second Murto holding Ann. At the sight of Jongor moving toward him, he let go the girl. Squalling and spitting, he backed away.

A frozen silence held the vast pit. The Murto had not yet had time to realize what was happening. Jongor was the only creature moving, and he was in action with the speed of lightning. From up above, yells of encouragement were coming.

"Give 'em hell, Jongor!"

Ann felt herself caught in Jongor's arm and lifted. The hook hung in the air a few feet away from the ledge. Below was the stone floor and certain death. The hook was still gyrating, an effort was still being made to move it

closer to them. Jongor did not wait for it to reach them.

Holding Ann in one hand, he leaped outward.

The girl was aware of a convulsive jerk inside her mind as she realized what Jongor was doing. Would he be able to grab the hook? Would he be able to hold on to it? She felt the jerk come as he caught the swinging hook with one hand. She held her breath.

FOR AN instant, she thought his hold was going to slip. She felt muscles tense all over his body. If his hand slipped, death was waiting for them below. It would be a faster, quicker death than on the black altar. But—

She felt his hand slip, then tighten. Slowly he drew himself upward, lifting his weight and hers. She got her hands on the hook too.

"Give 'em hell, Jongor!" the voice shouted exultantly from above.

The hook, carrying them with it, began to move upward. From all around them came an angry gasp. Prey that they had considered belonged to them was escaping from the Murto. Ann heard a bull throat roaring, caught a glimpse of Great Orbo jumping up and down in baffled rage.

Then the rifle began to thunder. She heard the bullets snap past her.

"Hold on tight, Ann," Jongor whispered. Another bullet went past: she flinched at the angry popping sound. As the hook swung, she caught a glimpse of Rouse firing at them from the ledge. Along the ledge Murtoes were dancing in baffled rage, shaking their fists and screaming what they would do when next they had them in their power. Again a bullet went past them, but it was farther away this time.

The hook swung in a great arc, moved inward, carrying them with it, dropped down to another ledge. Both

felt solid stone beneath their feet. They sank down. Along the ledge, a figure was running toward them.

"Ann! Jongor!"

"Alan! How did you get here?"

In the semi-darkness, the whiskered face of Alan Hunter was thin and gaunt. But a grin was showing through. "I've been hiding here for days. When I came to, after the fight in the dark with Umber, and couldn't find you, I came here. I knew that if the Murto caught you they would eventually bring you here. I watched the start of that little picnic down below without realizing what was happening, until you two appeared on the ledge. They were going to use this derrick, which was once used for lifting stone from the bottom of the shaft below, to swing you onto the altar." He gestured toward the throng on the ledge far below.

ROUSE WAS still looking upward, seeking for a target for his rifle. At the bottom of the pit, Gnomer was frantically turning the nozzle of the ray disintegrator of the ancient Murians. Howls of rage from the Murto filled the vast pit with a hollow, booming sound.

"Let's get out of here, quick," Ann whispered.

"No," Jongor said. "Alan, give me that spear." He did not wait for an answer from the youth. Instead he took the heavy spear from Alan's hand.

"What do you mean, Jongor? What are you going to do?" Alan said.

Holding the spear in one hand, he swung his body up into the hook.

"Drop me down there!" he gestured toward the bottom of the vast shaft.

"No, Jongor!" Ann screamed.

Jongor gestured downward with the spear. "We'll never get out of Lost Land if we leave that bunch in a condition to follow us."

"But—what can you do about it?

There are hundreds of them."

Quickly he explained what he was going to try to do.

Ann stood mute and silent, too paralyzed to speak.

"If you say so," Alan Hunter said soberly. "But you're taking a terrible chance."

"I say so," Jongor said. "Surprise will be on my side."

"All right, then." Slowly, Alan Hunter set in motion the machinery that operated the huge derrick.

GNOMER, crouching at the controls of the ray disintegrator, heard the thunder of rage coming from the Murto swell to a mighty chorus. For once, even his alert brain did not have an answer to the problem confronting him. Even after Ann and Jongor had vanished upward, he did not begin to guess what had happened. His guess was that some stupid Murto, assigned to the job of operating the lifting equipment, had made a mistake and had taken the intended victims upward instead of lowering them to the altar, as custom and tradition demanded.

"Damned stupid monkeys!" He cursed the whole Murto tribe with feeling and enthusiasm. On the ledge that circled the pit, he was aware that they were screaming and yelling at him. While he did not understand much of the Murto language, he got the idea that they were cursing him with equal feeling and enthusiasm. Not until then did it dawn on him that they were blaming him for what had happened. He could see Great Orbo jumping up and down and screaming at the top of his powerful lungs.

Gnomer began to get uneasy. But the rifle was in the operating compartment beside him. A heavy pistol was holstered at his belt. If the Murto chose to blame him for what had happened—well, he was sure the rifle

would make them change their minds. If the rifle didn't do the job... His fingers moved over the controls of the machine.

"Kill him!" he heard Great Orbo yell.

Gnomer was not really concerned about the Murto. They would be enraged for a while, then they would prudently forget the matter. The problem that was giving him concern was what had happened to Jongor and the girl. Intuitively, he recognized in the jungle giant a deadly enemy. Gnomer knew that he would never feel certain of getting out of Lost Land as long as Jongor was alive. With his knowledge of this disintegrator, which he could certainly peddle for any price he chose to ask, and with the other wealth that was available here, he would be the richest man on earth, if he could get out alive.

His mouth watered at the thought. He imagined the homes he could buy, the cars he could own, the women he could possess! Wealth beyond the dreams of Midas would be his!

Neither the Murto nor Jongor would ever stop him from getting out!

A rifle suddenly exploded on the ledge. He jerked his head in the direction from which it had come; saw that the Murto were attacking Rouse. He snatched his rifle up and fired once into the tangle of bodies.

BEFORE he could fire again, he saw Rouse seized, lifted into the air, pitched bodily from the ledge. Rouse screamed like a Murto as he went down. And as with the Murto, the scream went into sudden silence in the heavy thud of breaking bones and crumpling flesh.

Gnomer stared at the dark blob of matter that had once been Rouse. There had been a man named Rouse once. Now Rouse was lying over there,

a bundle of broken flesh. Like beat lightning along the horizon, fear flickered through Gnomer. Then he felt better. With Rouse gone, he would not have to split his take from Lost Land. Everything he could find here in this place would belong to him.

"To hell with him," he thought. "I was nothing but a stupid fool anyhow. I'm better off with him gone."

Above him, something moved.

He caught a glimpse of the moving object out of the corner of his eye, turned his head upward.

"Jongor!" he screamed.

Jongor was directly over the machine. As Gnomer saw him, he released his hold on the hook and dropped. As lithe as a jungle cat, he landed on top of the machine. Gnomer saw the blade of the spear in Jongor's hands.

Gnomer did not have time to turn the rifle and bring it to bear on Jongor. He knew the spear would be driven completely through him before he could get up the gun. What he did was leap in one startled convulsive jump out of the machine to the stone surface below.

He landed on his feet, stumbled, fell, hit and rolled to a sitting position. The rifle was still clutched in his hands. He brought it up.

To Jongor, it almost seemed as though the man had melted away from the hard-driven point of the spear. The blade, with the strength of his lungs behind it, crashed into the back of the control slot of the machine. The stout shaft cracked.

Gnomer was rolling on the floor. In a headlong dive Jongor went after him. A bullet roared past him, smoke blinded him; he struck the muzzle of the rifle with one hand.

"Damn you!"

Jongor's groping hands found Gnomer. His weight rolled the man backward. Gnomer was like a wildcat, his

muscles were coiled steel springs, released now under the impetus of fear. The man got both feet under Jongor, kicked violently upward.

Even a professional wrestler would have been hard-put to take the blow of those feet. But the man Gnomer was fighting was not a professional wrestler. He was a man who had grown up in the jungle, who had lived his whole life by his wits and his strength. The violent upward kick knocked Jongor off Gnomer, the blow gave him a feeling of nausea in his stomach, but it did not knock him out.

TWISTING HIMSELF, he threw his body back at Gnomer. The man twisted, turned, tried to evade the charge. Jongor landed on Gnomer's back. His hands went under the man's flailing arms and locked tight at the back of his neck. For an instant Gnomer thrashed wildly, then there was a sharp crack, as of something breaking.

Gnomer's body went limp.

His neck was broken.

Jongor rose to his feet. One menace was ended. This man had come to Lost Land seeking something. What he had found here was his death.

As Jongor rose to his feet, from far above came a yell.

"Look out, Jongor!"

Jongor did not have to look far to see the source of the danger now confronting him. From openings in the walls of the pit, the Murtoes were streaming, waving clubs and uttering screams of rage. There was no possible way to mistake their intention.

Seeing Jongor and Gnomer fighting, they had thought their chance had come. With the two humans battling each other, it would be easy to overwhelm both of them.

They meant to obliterate Jongor from the face of the earth. For years he had been a thorn in their bushy

hides; for years he had taunted and defied them. They had tried many times to catch and kill him. Always he had eluded them. Now was the hour of their vengeance. By some supermiracle he had escaped from becoming a sacrifice to the long-lost god of the pit, but he would not escape from them!

"Beat him to death!"

"Knock out his brains!"

"Stamp his guts into the rock!"

"Let me have him!"

"No, me first!"

When Jongor arose from Gnomer, they hesitated, an instant.

"Get him!" Great Orbo screamed.

"He is only one, we are many!"

The charge, which had hesitated momentarily, continued with renewed fury. Great Orbo was in the lead. His fanged mouth wide open, he was uttering shrill cries indicating what he intended to do to Jongor.

Jongor needed no time to size up the situation and to determine his chances. He knew instantly that he had no chance of facing this kill-crazy mob of monkey men. He would go down in the first wave. They would do to him all the things they were threatening to do.

A QUICK glance upward showed him that the hook had shifted. It was out of his reach. Perhaps a mighty leap might take him to it. Perhaps not. He knew he had no time to jump twice. If the first leap did not take him to the hook... He shook his head. The only chance he had....

A single leap took him up on the machine. He slammed himself into the seat where he had seen Gnomer sit.

He did not understand the operation of the levers, but he had seen Gnomer move them. He jammed the nearest one forward as far as it would go.

Out from the snout of the machine a blast of violent radiation flared. If

was not light, it was much too intense for that. It was such a flare of blinding radiance as might be found at the center of the sun. The tube was pointed slightly upward toward the wall. The blast of radiation hit there. Rock showered outward.

Inside the hooded guts of the mighty machine a grumbling roar began to build up. It was a thundering tumult of sound, the same sound that Ann and Jongor had heard when they had been held prisoner in the cell far above.

"This one turns loose the blast," Jongor thought. "The other one..."

He shoved the other lever. Instantly the giant tube began to swing around.

The blast of radiation struck the charging Murtos.

Like leaves before the hurricane, the radiation swept them backward. There was force in that light blast, force enough to lift a heavy monkey-man from his feet and to hurl him backward. There was heat in the blast too.

Jongor saw the Murtos lifted upward and hurled backward. As they were hurled away, their fur began to flame. By the time they hit the far wall, the energy blast was so fierce that their whole bodies were burning.

Jongor saw Great Orbo, his fanged mouth agape, caught in the blast of radiant flame. Saw the Murto lifted, twisted, hurled backward, heard Great Orbo's scream go into silence as he hit the wall.

All over the bottom of the pit, the Murtos who remained alive were running. They had met their own great god. They didn't care to have anything more to do with him. It was one thing when they were here to watch a sacrifice to this machine that they worshipped; it was quite another thing when they found themselves being offered as sacrifices.

The bottom of the vast pit was sud-

denly deserted.

The screams went into quick silence. Jongor turned off the machine. The throbbing roar died into silence. Now, yells of exultation coming from up above.

"Give 'em hell, Jongor!"

THAT WAS Alan Hunter yelling up there. At the sound, a semblance of a grin split Jongor's face. He rode the hook upward to where Ann and Alan waited.

"Now we can leave Lost Land in safety," Jongor said. "I do not imagine the Murtos will bother us again. Nor will Gnomer and Roux."

"Thank heaven we can finally get away from here," Ann spoke.

"I'll be glad to get out, too," Alan said. As he spoke, wistfulness sounded in his voice. Suddenly he was speaking again, words that were coming straight out of his heart. "But I'm coming back here some day. There's a lot that modern science can learn from studying these ancient Murians. That disintegrating ray down there, the crystal you wear, some of the other things we have seen. There's enough stuff here to keep a whole staff of scientists busy for a whole generation. I'm coming back here and I'm going to bring scientists with me." Alan suddenly paused, a little embarrassed by his own words.

"Why, Alan, you never indicated any interest in science before," Ann said, surprised.

"I know. But I've learned a lot of things here. And I'm coming back."

"Then I'll come back with you, some day," Jongor spoke impulsively. Born in this land, he had but a dim knowledge of science, but he sensed from Alan's attitude that here was something important. Of course, he wanted to see America first, the land of his parents, but later....

"Then I'm coming too," Ann said. "You two needn't think you can slip back here and leave me at home. We'll make it a threesome—"

A startled scream burst from her lips.

The three had been moving away from the ledge toward the opening of the tunnel that led to the outer world. They stopped.

Calazao stood there. The battleaxe was swinging freely in his hands.

"Where did he come from?" Ann gasped.

"It doesn't matter where he came from. All that matters is that he is here," Alan answered.

"Ho!" Calazao said. The sound was more of a grunt than a voiced word. Swinging his battleaxe, he charged full speed toward them.

THIS TIME his prey would not escape him. The fact that Jongor had eluded him in their previous counter had been a stinging nettle in the giant's pride. He had brooded about it until it had become almost more than he could bear. No other creature in Lost Land had ever been able to stand against him. Nor would Jongor. Not if Calazao could do anything about it.

"Get to one side," Jongor shouted to Ann and Alan. At his command, they leaped like startled children.

"Ho!" the giant screamed again. His battle-axe lifted high, he charged full speed ahead. It would be nothing for him to smash this smooth-skinned creature to the floor. Once the Murtos had paid him well for attempting to capture this creature. No doubt they would pay him even better for killing the man animal that they hated. Besides, there was his own pride to be considered.

Jongor stood waiting the charge. His body had dropped to a half crouch, but he had made no effort to escape.

He was unarmed, he had not even a knife. All he had were his hands, his wits, and his speed.

Calazao charged full tilt toward him. Jongor did not attempt to dodge. As the battle-axe started downward, as Calazao was almost upon him, Jongor moved—lightning fast! He went in under the falling axe, he caught the charging giant about the middle, lifted him.

Although Jongor did not know he was doing it, he was unconsciously using one of the oldest tricks that wrestlers know—using the strength of the other man against him. The battle-axe clanged heavily as the startled Calazao let go of it.

Jongor had him in the air. Moving at full speed, allowing the giant's momentum to carry him even faster, he raced toward the edge of the ledge.

The "Ho!" of delighted anticipation at the thought of crushing Jongor turned to a scream of mortal anguish as Calazao divined—too late—what was happening to him. Releasing the vast bulk, Jongor hurled Calazao outward, over the edge of the pit.

The scream came echoing back. Metal crashed heavily. Echoes flung back the sound. Then there was silence, sudden and complete.

VERY SOBERLY, the three made their way out of the ancient mines of the Murians.

Outside was the bright light of day. The sun was not two hours high in the sky. Before them, stretching away into far distances, was the vast expanse of Lost Land. Mists hung over the swamps. The sunlight made the mists pearl-colored. Brightly colored birds flashed in the trees. To their right and a little below them was the city of the Murtos. If any of the monkey-men had survived the blast inside and seen the three humans, they turned

and went hastily in the other direction. So far as the Murtos were concerned, it was all right with them if they never saw another human being. The Murtos had seen all of that breed of animal they ever wanted to see.

Off in the swamp, something moved. Jongor saw it. He glanced down at the crystal on his wrist.

"I see a dino," he said. "Wait until I call up that mountain of worm food. This time, we will ride out of Lost Land in style."

"There's nothing that I like better

than riding in style," Alan Hunter grinned.

Jongor felt a grin spread over his face, too. He slipped his arm around Ann's shoulder. Something of contentment came up inside of him. He was going to see the land of his parents. But one day he was coming back to the only home he had ever known.

The three of them made their way slowly toward the swamp where the dinosaur was feeding.

THE END



"HEY, JOE! Got a load of this!" The khaki-clad technician gestures toward the greenish-glowing 'scope screen. His companion looks at the pulsating dots covering the surface of the radar 'scope. Two men, isolated here at the top of the Arctic circle, know exactly what to do.

Joe presses the stud on the transmitter and picks up the mike. "Q-14 calling," he says quietly into the microphone, but his rapid breathing betrays his calm and, as soon as he gets acknowledgement, he starts to feed numbers and symbols into the transmitter. And all over Northern Canada parts of the radar screens are flaring into life. The raid is on.

Simultaneously in every town, village and city in Canada and the United States, over the radio and television stations: "...Ladies and Gentlemen...we interrupt this program to announce that an air raid is on its way... Remain calm and follow instructions.... All stations are going into radio silence.... Your stations will resume operation during the end of the raid and afterwards...."

The announcement is repeated and then everywhere there is radio silence....

That is not a fanciful situation. In the

event of war radio and television broadcasting stations serve as perfect, identifying guides for enemy bombers. Consequently they have to go into radio silence at the first sign of an enemy attack; otherwise it is possible for raiders to ride down broadcasting beams exactly like guided missiles homing on a beam. Naturally, during the course of a raid or afterwards, radio channels will be wide open, with information as to what the public should do.

Anticipating the dangers of future war, the Federal Communications Commission has recently held a closed meeting with thousands of broadcasters all over the nation. No information has been released but it can be assumed that orders similar to the suggested ones were given. Experience in England and Germany—as well as in Japan—where, during the last war, air-landing was intensive, has taught authorities exactly how to manage broadcasting facilities which can be an unmatched benefit when used as public communication media, but which can also constitute a two-edged sword, serving as a guide to enemy aircraft. Monitors will have to search the ether waves continually for clandestine transmitters which might be used by traitors. No precautions can be too great!



THE INNOCENT WEAPON



By Salem Lane

IT'S NOT an uncommon sight to see, while driving along any open stretch in city or country, model-airplane enthusiasts pouring energy into their hobby. This is a familiar sight, but there is a subtle change occurring within the field. More and more of the model aircraft are remotely controlled. In a word, the boys are playing with guided missiles—and that's not exaggerated at all.

Guided missiles stem directly from the fascinating hobby of flying model aircraft by radio control. With continual technical improvements it has been easier and easier to make the average model plane controlled by radio. During the war small model planes controlled this way

were used as anti-aircraft practice targets. Since then, hobbyists as well as military researchers have poured the full flood of electronic advancement into constructing these miniature guided missiles and from experimenting with them they have greatly aided the guided missile program.

It wouldn't be the first time that amateurs have given professionals a boost. It's happened in television and radio. As a matter of fact, many of our present guided-missile engineers started out as model-plane enthusiasts! This healthy preparation has given us an incalculable asset. The step from a toy airplane to a deadly guided missile is not as long as you might think!



ALL ATOMS VANISH!

By A. T. Kedzie

A LITTLE scientific news note tucked away in the back pages of the Atomic Energy Commission's report reveals a very interesting and disturbing fact. Atoms of copper, silver and bromine have been caused to fission atomically. In other words, they have been shattered. Now what significance has this? Well, scientists have always believed that the chemical elements in the middle of the atomic table—that is, those of average atomic weight—have been stable. They've thought these elements unlikely to break down. They've regarded them as stable bulwarks in a very precariously poised atomic system.

But as experiment shows, this isn't the case. It could appear now as if all elements are subject to atomic disintegration! While it is true that not all have been shattered, it is really only a matter of time. This disquieting news may be looked upon favorably or unfavorably. The good thing is that it suggests that eventually any element may be used in atomic furnaces and generators. Unfortunately, it also suggests that any element may eventually be used as an explosive! It's too early to say whether either of these conclusions is completely valid, but the suggestion is there. What element will be next—oxygen? nitrogen? carbon?...



By Jon Barry

IT IS A familiar fact of experience that when the Sun descends below the horizon, darkness does not descend at once. A strong afterglow persists for some time, even though the Sun is no longer there. This zodiacal light is due to a number of causes, the refracting power of the atmosphere being the most familiar. Sundlight is bent by the air and dispersed and consequently we still see light after the source is gone.

Recently astronomers have discovered another cause for this zodiacal glow. It is comet dust and meteoric dust, detritus and debris circling in the plane of the Earth's path around the Sun. This fine dust, the trailing excrement of comets, mixes and refracts the Sun's light just as any dust would do and this accounts for a strong portion of the afterglow.

Dust particles and debris in interplanetary space are of increasing importance to astronomical observation. The presence of such material was long suggested partially by its optical effects, and more recently by its effects on radio waves coming to us from the Sun and stars. Of course the word "dust" is used very liberally here, since actually space containing the matter is still very nearly a perfect vacuum. In no respect is it dense. Its effect on interplanetary travel, of course, will be nonexistent.



Then Death looked down and said, "My work is finished . . ."

No Price Too Great

By GRAHAM DOAR

"Let my son live in a world where war is impossible," prayed Zed's father. There was a way it could happen—the only way?



HIS FATHER was a minister of the Gospel, a strong man and one joyful in the strength of the Lord. His mother was a good and beautiful woman, with a smile warm and calm like sunlight in a summer morning.

He was born at 11:58 p.m. on August 6, 1945.

High over the torn Earth, over the shuddering fields ploughed with shattered steel and sown to blood, over maimed and writhing Europe gasping in the dust of the broken cities, drifted lazily the smoke and ashes, the stench of the burned, the rotting bodies of men. Over smouldering, hell-drenched Hiroshima hovered the

quietly (now) fissioning particles of restless matter, prodded from their eons of sleep by man's unquiet hand.

Radios blared and blatted and on the streets of the city newsboys, too hoarse to cry their wares, danced and leaped and waved the glaring headlines.

He lay in the curve of his mother's arm and slept. On his father's face there was great tenderness but no joy. Only a strong sadness, a weariness in the long fight. The man said, "We'll call him *Zedekiah*, Julia, meaning 'the justice of the Lord'. May it prevail."

His mother's dark eyes were bright with proud tears. "Zedekiah. Little Zed. He'll have a good life, Henry. I know it. He'll be a minister, like you—or a doctor, maybe."

Through the window, open to the summer night, came the triumphant, brazen blare of a military band.

The father bowed his head and spoke gently: "I would ask nothing, Julia. Nothing at all. My one wish would be, as I have served God, that this boy, born on this terrible night, might live to see peace on Earth. Everywhere on Earth."

HE GREW up through the years of the Fear, the years when the black shadow lay over the land, over all the lands of Earth. He was nearly five when work was started on the hydrogen-fusion "super" bomb.

"H-BOMB POWER UNLIMITED!" the newspapers screamed in headlinear ecstasy, and their "science editors" wrote long and learnedly about blast radius, areas of "total", "partial" and "limited" destruction. They compared the action of the H-bomb to the reaction going on in the sun. The Enemy read the learned articles, looked up at the blazing sun which shone also on them, and went immediately to work on an H-bomb of their own. The most stringent security

measures were to no avail.

When Zed was twelve he wanted to be a minister of the Gospel like his adored father, and walk in sober raiment and humble pride before the Lord. But a year later he was thirteen and he thought a famous surgeon was a finer thing to be. Surgeons saved lives and they made more money.

In 1960, when he was fifteen, both sides had a stockpile of hydrogen bombs and work on their production had begun to slack off. The early tests were satisfactory, the press expressing disappointment in the H-bomb's destructiveness and the admirals pointing out that the only effective defense against such a weapon was a really adequate navy. A small tribe of natives from a small Pacific island was paid liberally for its former home which had disappeared.

WORK BEGAN on the Z-bomb.

This one, the rejuvenated science editors pointed out, was at least one thousand times more powerful than the H-bomb. Indeed, the three physicists who had jointly perfected it protested, this was a conservative estimate. Since its effect was to disrupt the binding force of matter—all matter—it's power was truly unlimited. **Z-BOMB POWER UNLIMITED!** the headlines ran.

Zed studied avidly the articles and the charts and diagrams the science editors prepared, and he felt a shudder of horrified pleasure as he thought of this beautiful and deadly thing that man had conceived. He thought he would like to be a nuclear physicist, or at least a technician, and be allowed to help with this all-important work. Surely, anyone who had a hand in its construction would have honor and glory without stint from a grateful country.

The three scientists, in their com-

fortable underground (literally) quarters at the "Pike's Peak Project", were permitted to see their wives monthly in the presence of a wire recorder. Every other month, their children could visit them. Of course, even this much freedom could not be permitted the technicians and laborers on the task but, for the most part, they bore their restrictions willingly, sweating cheerfully away in the bowels of the Earth with that whole-souled, selfless absorption in the work that is known only to those who serve.

The large brass among the military, those "in the know", walked with a more elastic stride and their faces beamed a purer joy. Even the admirals admitted cautiously that this new weapon, the Z-bomb, would probably destroy a battleship within a reasonable range. And the best thing of all—oh, the wonderful thing—was that the Enemy couldn't build them.

Never? Well, not for a long time. They had the scientific knowledge, all right, the principles were, after all, simple, but *they lacked the know-how!* The Z-bomb, it was agreed, foreshadowed the end of the Fear.

THERE WERE many "hugs" to be overcome and Zed was in his senior year at the University before the first test of the new bomb was announced. Called "Operation Zed" (for the Z-bomb, of course, but imagine the boy's delight!), it was to be packed in the warhead of a rocket to the moon. The two physicists who now headed the Pike's Peak Project, their colleague having gone into the hospital for observation which he terminated by leaping from the sixth floor, had insisted their first package be tried elsewhere than Earth.

For security reasons, the exact date of the test was not announced, but the ubiquitous reporters managed to pin

it down fairly well and Zed kept a pair of powerful binoculars trained on the moon every night for a week. The explosion wasn't much, a mere pinpoint flash later announced as a three-hundred-mile crater. But Zed's imagination was caught and held by the sweet, true curve of the rocket's flashing light as it flamed and roared on its mission. He made up his mind then. He would enlist in the Air Forces and train for a rocket pilot.

His father's old eyes, old and weary in a young and vigorous face, were haunted. But he smiled and the hand he put on Zed's shoulder was steady. "All right, Zedekiah. I'll put no pressure on you one way or the other. A man must live as he sees fit, and the one thing I ever asked for you grows more hopeless daily. These are terrible times."

Zed had heard of his father's birth-wish for him. He realized, suddenly, a little of the agony of spirit a man of God might bear in this year of Our Lord, nineteen hundred and sixty-seven. He said, uncomfortably, "Don't worry, Dad. When the Enemy gets a sniff of this new one, the Z-bomb, he'll climb down in a hurry."

THE TRAINING course for the strato-rocket pilots was both rigorous and dangerous. Zed, only twenty-four when they pinned on him the silver wings with the gold comet inlaid, looked like a man of thirty. But he had loved every minute of it. The rowdy rough-and-tumble of the BOQ, the passes into town, one of a group of the jaunty, hard-eyed "hell-riders" who met with reserve the eager greetings of the men, with ready grins the sidelong, secret eyes of the girls. This was the life.

The life was, above all, the breath-stopping, ever-renewed, wild delight of screaming before the full-throated,

roaring thrust of the mighty rockets—up, up, up and up right to the edge of the stratosphere where it thinned out into the black void of deep space itself.

Some day, he knew, some day when the Fear was lifted and man had time and money and courage again, a ship would be built that would thrust on through that thin veil to conquer forever the black emptiness. And he, or one of the other hell-riders, would be at the controls of the mighty ship and that man's name would live for all time in deathless glory. Zed breathed, ate and slept with the dream of that day before him.

HE WAS twenty-six when they gave him his major's leaves, and the President shook his hand. Zed had just flown the new ship at a bit over ten thousand miles an hour and the Air Forces made him their white-haired boy for a day. The President left immediately after the ceremonies, hurrying back to Denver, but Zed had a five-day leave. It was his first trip to Washington which was still, for publicity purposes, the nation's capital. The stern affairs of government had been for some time carried on under the shadow of the tall, impregnable Rockies.

The President had good reason for hurrying. That was Fall of 1971. That was the year the third and final World War got under way.

The Secretary of State, the Secretary for Internal Security and the Secretary of Defense with his three generals and one admiral, were in session with the President.

Internal Security was a comparative newcomer in the Cabinet, his bureau having been taken from the Department of Justice and given departmental status only a few years before. But he was old in the government serv-

ice and had known many Presidents. He was speaking now, "Mr. President, the security on the development of the Z-bomb has been nearly perfect—all that man could make it. But there have been leaks. There are always leaks. We know that, as of last month, the Enemy has begun production of Z-bombs."

Defense broke in: "We must act now, Mr. President. Any delay whatsoever may be fatal, since we face the fact that from now on our present superior striking power will grow less superior day by day. The demonstration should be held as soon as possible."

"All right, gentlemen," the President's trained voice was full and rich though he spoke quietly. "I agree that haste is in order. The arrangements have been made for the observers from the UN Security Council and, I understand, General Messner's group is all set. I see no reason why the date should not be set for October first—that's three days from now."

Defense looked at one of the three generals. "How does that strike you, Waldo?"

THE HEAD of Guided Missiles had only recently got his fourth star. He came to his feet, but he hooked his thumbs in his Sam Browne belt. Be damned if he'd stand to attention if these five-star bootlickers didn't. He growled, "Hell—pardon me, Mr. President, gentlemen—I'm ready to go on an hour's notice. The area's been cleared and the rocket's set up, armed and ready. We'll blow a hole in that desert that'll make their hair stand up. But I'll tell you, Mr. President, what I'd like. I have five thousand guided rockets dispersed on several fields lined up and ready to go. If the bas—pardon me, Mr. President—if they want a *real* demonstration—why

--just say the word and we will damn well let them have it. I'd damn well put a stop to their producing any Z-bombs. Huh!" He sat down.

They all smiled and the lone admiral laughed aloud. "That's the stuff to give 'em," he cried.

"No doubt," said the President drily, "but I think we'll try this plan first. All right, gentlemen, October first at, say, 1000 hours." He made a brief note on the pad on his desk. "The press release will come from State and will be handed out that morning. There will be no other discussion about it, either before or after the demonstration, until we are absolutely certain what the Enemy's reaction is to be.

"Our intention is—we may as well face it—to coerce them with a show of force, of potential striking power, into agreement with the principles of international security as suggested by us time and again—periodic inspection of arms and arms production, free exchange of news and the rest of it. Well, we're being forced to act the bully, but we must be extra careful not to antagonize them more than we can help. That word, gentlemen, will be passed on to your subordinates."

Amid a chorus of acquiescence, he arose.

The admiral had been amusing himself by making, on the back of an envelope, some off-hand calculations as to the probable destruction General Messner's five thousand Z-bombs would cause if properly dispersed among the Enemy's larger cities. Now, as he got up to file out with the rest of them, he jotted on the paper "1000 hrs. Oct. 1" and slipped it in his pocket. He never gave it another thought. The date was an easy one to remember and it was just an old envelope.

It took thirty-six hours to reach the

Enemy capital.

THE ENEMY knew a few tricks about internal security that the Honorable's Secretary, functioning in a democracy, couldn't employ. Whatever his information to the contrary, they had been making Z-bombs for some time and, in their bumbling way, had built up quite a supply.

They sat long in conference over the pencilled notes on the admiral's frayed envelope, but only one conclusion could be drawn. They'd had rumors, of course, of a new move against them planned for an early date, but they'd not expected this. Nothing like this. However...

There was only one possible move once the conclusion had been drawn. The first blow must be theirs. They were ready. They were always ready.

They set the hour for the morning of September thirtieth and the rocket-launching fields were alerted.

ZED HAD his orders to report back to the field in Arizona by noon. He took one last gay look at Washington's brighter spots and slept late that last morning. It was about ten when the gyro-taxi dropped him at Capital Airport and he hurried over to his ship. The big fuel tanks topped off, the metal skin gleaming, the twelve huge tubes scraped and plated, USAF Comet pointed its nose skyward as though reaching for the stars. He patted it affectionately, stepped through the air-tight door and dogged it shut. He checked his fuel, his fire, his breathing oxygen and the myriad instruments on the control panel. The tower, when he gave his identification and destination, turned him over to Radio Ground Control 3 and he waited for flight instruction.

The radar screens picked up the first flight of fifty Enemy bombs at 1011

hours and the ram-jet interceptors, proximity fused, screamed upward on their track. Hell had moved above ground.

Of the second flight, two got through, one to Manhattan Island, one in the Atlantic off North Carolina. An unprejudiced observer would have had to admit that the Enemy Z-bombs were in no way inferior. Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds were, suddenly, one with the Atlantic Ocean, and the wave raced inland for a hundred miles, lashed to frothy fury by the hurricane winds. The few survivors that reached Charlotte and the towns to the west said the wall of water was a mile high.

New York City, with large portions of New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania, simply had disappeared. The sea rushed in to fill the enormous hole.

The defensive interception net was a complete success. Of twenty flights of bombs, fifty to a flight, that came over during the one-hour attack, less than a hundred got through to their targets. A better than ninety per cent loss for the Enemy.

ZED NEITHER heard the rumbling nor felt the ground shake. In the cockpit of the Comet he was well insulated and he was listening attentively to RGC 3. "At zero, fire rockets 2 and 8. At zero plus one second, fire 6 and 12. At zero plus one minute, fire 4 and 10. At zero plus four minutes, you will be at zenith. At zero plus eight, cut acceleration and begin your glide. Over."

He read it back and asked for a take-off time.

"O.K., Comet. Zero is 1016 hours, 1016 hours. Over. Do you hear me, Comet? They're blasting somewhere near and I can hardly read you. Come in, Comet. Over."

Zed turned up the volume and the voice from Radio 3 nearly broke his

eardrums. "Goddlemighty, it's bombs! Take off, Comet! Take off, it's an attack! Over and cut!"

His heart pounded so that his eyes blurred but his hands were cool and steady on the switches as he fired rockets 2 and 8. He felt the ship quiver as he counted aloud, "And one!" and switched on 6 and 10. USAF Comet danced for a second on its flaming tail, then *whooshed* upward with a hissing roar.

THEY SEEMED to be concentrating their attack, as was to be expected, at the two seaboard. Some fifteen or twenty of the missiles plunged down on the Boston-New York-Philadelphia-Washington area. This populous section was sheared from the continent as though by a giant bulldozer and the muddy, debris-laden sea swirled over the ugly wound.

At 1014 hours, just three minutes after the first Enemy bombs were picked up on the screens, General Messner's five thousand armed and ready rockets began to take off and whine upward into invisibility. In a deathly quiet room, the President sat with his head in his hands while Messner, at the visiphone, muttered through stiff lips, "The bastards will never get through paying for this—but there goes a little something on the account."

This was before they knew, here in the Denver capital, that the Enemy was employing the Z-bomb.

The San Francisco-Los Angeles area was the second hardest hit. To the north, the one bomb that plumped into Puget Sound eliminated Seattle, Tacoma and Olympia. Portland, Oregon, escaped with minor damage from concussion which the citizens, for a short while, attributed to an earthquake.

At the end of the hour, looking at it coolly, the damage was not too great.

The United States was a tremendous country and there was a great deal of it left, most of it more or less intact. Both coastlines were permanently and badly altered, but the interior had suffered surprisingly little. Chicago and vicinity was a wet hole in the earth into which Lake Michigan slowly seeped, and a number of tourists were killed when Yellowstone Park erupted into nothing.

The direct hit on the underground capital at Denver caused a lot of speculation about the Enemy's new and improved radio controls. Such accuracy over those thousands of miles was impressive. It was really, however, just a fluke.

General Messner never lived to know what enormous havoc he had wrought with his retaliatory punch. It would have pleased him to know that the damage to the Enemy was infinitely greater than that they had accomplished.

WHEN THE Z-bomb struck Washington, at 1016 hours, Zed was miles up and going away. The concussion flipped the Comet into a cart-wheel, end over end, but Zed was an Air Forces rocket pilot, a hell-rider and one of the best. He cut the switches and managed to right the ship, using the turbo-jet landing engines for power. When he got its nose up again, he switched on full acceleration, all twelve tubes, and went for altitude.

His Ground Control screen had gone dead, of course, when the bomb struck. He was flying on his own and, at strato-rocket speeds, it was quite a trick. Navigation was not the strong suit of the hell-riders, anyway, since they were RGC trained from the beginning.

So it was that he was a little north of his course into the Arizona field, passing over Denver at 200,000 feet

and something under 2000 miles per hour. He realized he was too high and he increased the angle of his glide slightly. Even so he would have over-shot his mark.

It was 1058 hours.

Zed saw, or thought he saw, the bomb when it plummeted across his field of vision, miles ahead. He definitely saw the towering, shimmering plume of dirt and debris, disintegrating as it mounted, that erupted ahead of him.

The steel-hard shock waves of unimaginable violence rippled outward from that tremendous concussion, and Zed's ship smacked its belly against them. The Comet ricocheted upward in a skimming glide like a flat stone from water.

Zed blacked out.

The gleaming ship turned lazily at its zenith and pointed its nose downward.

A LONG a seam in the cracked face of the earth, near where Yellowstone had been, ran a stream of white-hot, molten metal. It reached a yawning fissure across its path and plunged over the lip, a shining, hissing Niagara. Deep within the fissure sounded a bubbling roar.

Suddenly, a coruscating, opaque cloud of violet steam, swirling and crackling with golden motes of fire, shot upward a mile into the air. Zed's Comet, screaming down out of the sky from the southeast, plunged through the cloud.

The ship glowed briefly, a lurid, luminescent blue, and the air within the compartment sparkled with dancing particles of visible energy. The oxygen was transmuted, gone, and in its place was a pungent, not unpleasant gas that was never smelled on Earth. Zed's unconscious form shifted slightly and his clenched hands slow-

ly relaxed. His breathing slowed, stopped.

The metal skin of the Comet dulled and darkened as it flattened in a shallow glide. Miles away, toward the coast, it came to a flat, belly-sliding landing on the slope of a mountain. Almost as though a hand were at the controls.

THE THIRD WORLD WAR went on. The devastation was considerable before both sides ran out of Z-bombs. Their production capacity had long ago been wrecked so they turned to their stockpiles of older weapons, the A- and H-bombs.

Poisonous radiation blanketed much of the world's racked and tortured surface before these, too, were gone. The thing was finished, finally, by old pilots with long memories flying the antiquated jet-bombers. From either side they came, dropping, with haphazard manual releases, puny bombs of inefficient TNT that broadcast over a small area (per bomb) the innocent, the deadly bacteria.

There were defenses, of course, and such defenses as there were, they employed.

But the bacteria met the radiation and multiplied and were changed. New defenses were devised, but the bacteria had again multiplied—and changed. Still doughty man, indefatigable man, did not despair. He tried again.

But there were, now, fewer and fewer men and more and more bacteria and always they changed, they changed and the people died in new and horrible ways. Such an unequal contest could have but one end.

The last man on Earth, but one, sat beside the body of his dead wife and watched the flesh drip from his fingers in ropy strings. His hands would not clutch the sharp shard of glass he had found, but he had managed to fix

it in position so that he could cut his throat. And so he died.

The last man on Earth but one.

TIME MARCHED and wheeled his columns through Space, driving Earth's spinning globe around the Sun and around. The land under the metal bulk of the rocket ship slithered and sank and, for a century or two, the Pacific lashed its ponderous whips against the almost impervious skin; then the land heaved and rose and the waves again lapped and hissed and occasionally roared a mile or two away.

Crystals of various salts formed around the edge of the air-tight door and began to eat. Chemicals from air, water and earth searched out the minute fraction of vulnerability in the alloy and began to drive pinpoints of corrosion. All the ingenuity of ingenious man had gone into making this ship's metal incorruptible, but the centuries are larger than laboratories and nothing is eternal.

There was a day when, around the invisible seam where the door fitted into the curved side, came a *ploof* like the opening of a vacuum-sealed tin of coffee. The air sparkled, suddenly brilliant blue, and there was a penetrating odor. Zed's eyelids fluttered and his stiff, awkward lips mouthed words.

"Sir, I have to report that the cities of Washington and Denver are under attack by enemy bombs!"

The portentous, stilted phrases fell flatly and without meaning into the piled and rusted silence of the centuries.

Zed opened his eyes and looked around and his eyes saw peace, perfect peace. Everywhere on Earth.

And he died.

THE END

GEODETIC TAFFY-PULL!

By Russell Newton Roman

"HYPOTHESES, hypotheses!—I need hypotheses like I need a hole in the head," a famous geologist is reputed to have remarked—or words to that effect. He was referring, of course, to the confusion that surrounds our knowledge of the interior of the Earth. Everyone, including the downstairs maid, has taken a fling at guessing about the interior of the Earth and each guess has been about as valid as any other. The simple fact is that nobody knows.

For a long while the Earth was assumed to have a solid core, an interior of rock. Later theorists suggested that its density indicated it must be made of molten nickel-iron under such tremendous pressures that it was practically rigid. And so it went on with theory after theory coming out—but no facts appearing at all.

Recent studies have tended to weaken the idea of a rigid Earth, especially in light of the observations which have been made with extremely sensitive instru-

ments, and which disclose that, under the gravitation attraction of the Moon, old Mother Earth flexes like a five day strip- per in a burlesque house. The variation between predictions based on theory and those on actual observation of flexures of the Earth's crust between California and Hawaii is as great as, or more than, one hundred per cent!

And so the matter rests. Our knowledge of the Earth's interior is slight. Until some mechanical mole is devised (science-fiction has handled this idea nicely) we won't really know. The construction of a mechanical mole capable of withstanding immense pressures and powered by an atomic engine is slowly approaching the realm of feasibility. It will undoubtedly be many years before such a machine is built but it is in the cards. Then, when it bores a few tens of miles or maybe hundreds of miles into the crust (if that's possible without melting) we'll get some real idea of how rigid or flexible this ancient old planet is. Until then, your guess is as good as anybody's!

THE BANTUS WITH THE BRAINS

By Rita Glanzman

THE VAST gulf between education (or experience) and intelligence is not often appreciated. People who occasionally come into contact with so-called "primitive" peoples often imagine that they are unintelligent. That judgment is a reflection on the person making it, for there is vast evidence to support the fact that intelligence is a common denominator among all human beings, be they Hottentots or Eskimos—or the product of our finest universities.

The reports of numerous British anthropologists who have studied Australian aborigines and African tribesmen show clearly that intelligence is completely independent of experience. Mathematicians and logicians, incidentally, will confirm this.

Among certain Bantu tribesmen of South Africa, there is an amazingly high general intelligence level, clearly evidenced by the speed with which the natives learn languages and acquaint themselves with the

civilized man's culture. It has been reported that the Bushman, for example, will demonstrate the utmost impatience with the white man's conversation because it is so slow! Very often, before the speech is completed, the Bushman will already have grasped the intent of the speaker. Memories among these peoples are similarly keen.

The point of the whole matter is, of course, that some day men may come into contact with a far stranger species whose minds may operate on levels far beyond our own. Most scientists and writers on interplanetary travel assume an anthropocentric view of things, suggesting that the existence of intelligent life elsewhere—whatever the form—is hardly to be expected. This is surely not a sound supposition. The outward manifestations of their culture do not necessarily reflect the intelligence or the military potential of an alien race.



He Knew What He Wanted

Dan was ready to drop his career just to marry a space tycoon's daughter—only to learn eight other men were ahead of him!

By E. K. Jarvis

"I LOVE you, Doris. Will you marry me?"

She looked up into his serious eyes and suddenly pushed away from him and took a few steps that brought her to the edge of the escarpment. Below were the lights of The Astral City, capital of the Centauri System and on the planet Seet. She heard his soft step behind her. She lifted her eyes to look at Sett luna, now in quarter phase with Alpha and half phase with Beta.

She felt his hands settle firmly against her shoulders. She leaned back, cradling the back of her head under his chin.

"I love you too, Dan," she said gently.

"Then you'll marry me?"

"I will—if you can get dad's consent."

"Then it's all settled," Dan said. "There's no reason why he shouldn't give his consent, and naturally I have to have it—we have to have it. That's colony law."

His hands gently turned her around and drew her to him while his eyes

caressed the rich auburn depths of her hair, the symmetry of her face, the inviting smile of her lips.

"Let's go beard the lion right now," he said.

Her arms came up and around his neck. Her lips sought his fiercely and clung with unleashed passion for a long moment. Then she drew back and smiled with stars in her blue eyes.

"Let's," she said.

They hurried to the car. She snuggled beside him while he shifted the drive to the copter blades. They had driven up the winding road, but now he was in a hurry. A minute later the small flat they were on dropped away and they were out over the deeps, the high cliff receding rapidly behind and the light of The Astral City rushing toward them.

Twenty minutes later they settled on a landing lot. The copter blades stopped and began retracting. He shifted to rear wheel drive and left the lot, merging with the traffic for two short blocks before darting into a driveway that wound between short evergreens toward the colonial style

mansion set back from the street.

When they got out of the car, he took her hand possessively and hurried up the porch steps while she half ran to keep up, an excited light in her eyes. They found Conrad Matheson in his study.

Matheson smiled at first as they came in. But then, abruptly, his eyes narrowed. He laid aside the book he had been reading and stood up. Compared to Dan's height of seven feet three inches and his daughter Doris' six feet eight, Conrad was a short man, hardly over six feet. But there was a rugged strength to his face and his lean body that gave the impression of unbreakable granite.

Dan came to a stop, still holding Doris' hand. He looked down at her for reassurance, then back to Conrad Matheson. "Sir, I've come to ask your permission to marry Doris. May I have it?"

Matheson stared at him, his face expressionless. Slowly a smile widened his lips. "I see no reason why I shouldn't give it," he said slowly, "provided you are the right man for her."

Dan laughed. "That's not for me to say, sir. I hope I am. Certainly, if love means anything, I am, because I love her."

"Then it's all settled," Matheson said. "You will resign your position with Centauri Cartel at once and come to work for me. She's my only child, you know, and in marrying her you are also marrying eventual ownership of the Matheson industrial empire. As soon as the changeover has been made and you're demonstrating your ability to take my place eventually, we'll make the announcement and set the date of the wedding."

"But..." Dismay settled on Dan's face. "I've worked hard to get where I am in C. C. I thought one of my qualifications would be the fact that

I don't need to ask for special privilege, and am reasonably successful on my own hook."

"That is one of your qualifications," Matheson said, "but if you want to become Doris' husband, you can't continue in a minor post with another company. It would be foolish, anyway, when you're going to own factories and mines and spacelines before long."

"I don't want them, sir," Dan said. "I much prefer what I have now. I'm not marrying Doris for—"

"But I'm not allowing the industrial empire I've built to fall apart," Matheson said. "Change over—or forget about Doris."

"MR. CARTER will see you now." Dan Adams flashed a smile at the trim receptionist and went to the Sett-mahogany paneled door which bore the neat inscription, *Thomas Carter, Exit Interviewer*.

As he stepped inside the office, proportions abruptly altered. Thomas Carter was an Earthman, as his dwarfish five feet nine inches of height attested. In the colonies, Dan knew, an exit interviewer was always a home office man, responsible to no one but his superiors back on Earth. In that way, the home office could keep tabs on its farflung empire without interfering with its operations.

The man himself was instantly likeable, from his well fitting tan business suit to his neatly combed iron gray hair. He rose from behind his low desk whose top would have come just even with Dan's knees, and came around and shook hands.

"I must say that your resignation is a great surprise," he said. "Your reason for leaving is hardly adequate, but we understand quite well the urge that sometimes makes a man change companies. Sit down. I want to talk with you."

Dan took one of the Settle-size chairs. Carter went around and sat at his desk again, picking up some papers and studying them.

He glanced up and smiled at Dan. "It says you have an opportunity to better yourself with Matheson, Incorporated. I can't quite agree with that. You see, Dan, you're a good man. You know space and you're familiar with a hundred different worlds and satellites. You know how to get work out of men and native races. We haven't exactly come around and patted you on the back and painted a rosy picture of your future with the company, but I can assure you that your opportunities with C. C. are far greater than anything Matheson can ever offer you. I think you know that. So—how about giving me the lowdown?"

"I see no reason why not," Dan said. "Actually, I don't want to quit. Colony law is that for any girl to marry she must have the signature of her father or legal guardian on the marriage contract. Also, under colony law, if a girl's father dies, the court appoints a guardian for her. I'm going to marry Doris Matheson. Her father insists that I go to work for him."

"So that's it!" Carter said. He studied Dan for several moments. Finally, he got up and went over to a row of filing cabinets. Dan watched curiously while he opened several drawers and took out files. He came back to the desk with eight files and laid them down. "You'll find these quite interesting," he said, opening back the heavy paper cover of the first file folder and taking out the top sheet.

"THE DATE," Carter said, reading from the standard resignation form, "October 8, 2304. That's eight months ago. Employee, Harold B. Townsend. Reason for resigning..." Carter looked up at Dan and

laid the paper down. "Going to work for Conrad Matheson because he was going to marry Doris Matheson."

"What!" Dan was out of his chair and hastily scanning the resignation in the file.

"The others in the files under that one resigned for the same reason," Carter said.

"Why—why Doris never—" Dan clamped his lips shut.

"No, I don't suppose she would mention them," Carter said. "After all, a girl doesn't start life with the man she loves by giving him the history of all her past boyfriends."

Dan looked at Carter angrily, saw the man's attitude wasn't spiteful. "No," he shrugged.

"I'm very interested in this little side drama of colony life," Carter said. "You see, the first person whose resignation I OK'd when I took over this office here was Harry Townsend's. I was very happy about it and wished him the best of everything. It was my second day behind this desk. Then, after he had gone, I ran his card through the classification machines. I was more than surprised when the machine notified me that the classification 'Quit to work for Conrad Matheson. Reason: Going to marry Doris Matheson' contained seven other names, with dates of quitting extending over a period of four years." He chuckled. "First thing I thought of was that it must be a gag. An excuse for quitting. I investigated and found that two of the men later killed themselves, four died in accidents within six weeks of quitting, and the other two left the Centauri System for parts unknown."

"Is this on the level?" Dan asked, unbelieving.

Carter nodded. "I'm not letting you know all this just to scare you," he said. "And I'm not casting aspersions against Doris Matheson. My investiga-

tions have brought out something I felt I should let you know about. Sit down."

Dan went back to his seat. Carter studied him in silence for a long time. Then, "Conrad Matheson is a fine man. His employees worship him. He came out here as a subsidized colonist and in fifteen years gained his independence and married and started his own space mines. By sheer guts he climbed up, until now his holdings total two hundred and eighty billions of dollars. His wife died seven years ago. His only known relative is his daughter. He worships her. He wants her to marry a man that has the same qualities he has. Guts. Unquenchable drive. Judging from the reports, he'll start in by putting you through the paces. He'll try every means at his disposal to break you down. I don't know what will happen if you come through with flying colors, because none of these eight predecessors of yours did. Who knows? Maybe he doesn't want her married. Maybe he sets out to turn every suitor of his daughter into a snivelling coward.... I just thought I would warn you." He stared at Dan for a moment, then changed abruptly to business. "Your resignation will be accented. The auditors report you have a hundred and twenty-eight thousand dollars in severance pay coming. The check is waiting for you at the cashier's cage. And—good luck, boy." He held out his hand with frank friendliness.

"I'M NOT telling anyone you're to be my son-in-law, and I'm sure you wouldn't want to start working for me that way," Conrad Matheson had said. "It would handicap you to have employees say behind your back that you were the darling of the old man's daughter."

"Right," Dan had agreed, smiling. Behind his smile he had been studying

Matheson keenly, trying unsuccessfully to fathom what lurked behind those hard impersonal eyes.

"You go on the books as a t.s. Ostensibly, I went out and looked over the field and hired you away from C.C. That will mean to the trouble shooting department that I think you a pretty good man, which I do." Matheson's smile had been on his lips only.

"Yes, sir," Dan had said.

And now he was pointing his sleek cruiser down toward the snowcapped peaks of the planet Nono, first of the eighty outer planets of the Centauri system whose orbits encompassed both suns in a vast oval orbit band. It was Matheson Mines territory exclusively. The ship catalogue listed it as such.

The language machine had been droning into Dan's ears all the way from Sett. Occasionally, he spoke into the microphone at his lips, attached to the lightweight earphones, then listened to the machine's analysis of how far off the native accent he was. The machine combined teaching of the native language with a history of the planet and the customs of its natives. When he landed he would be able to deal directly with the natives as well as the human employees.

He landed on the scorched tableland of lava that was the ready made spaceport of Nono. While he waited for some sign of a reception committee, he reread the trouble sheet. Auditors' reports showed a wide discrepancy between the chromium content of assayed ore and the amount coming from the refineries. Either the ore samples were not representative, or a lot of pure chrome was being stolen. It was up to him to find out, and find out quickly.

A gyro appeared over the sharp crest of a hill a mile away. Dan slipped into his work clothes. Nylon coveralls with innumerable pockets

containing everything from pocket machine pistol to self-administerable plasma cannisters. By the time the gyro had settled a hundred yards away from the ship, he was out and climbing down the handholds on the shell to the ground.

He frowned uneasily when he saw the lone occupant of the gyro was a native. The creature was an enoskele-tal. About half the intelligent races thus far discovered were insect in form. Their means of communication was thin tubes containing fine muscles that caused the tubes to vibrate in a manner similar to human vocal cords, with the sound made audible by the sounding board effect of the skeletal case at their base.

But he had expected a human to meet him.

"Hello," the native called cheerily. "I'm Charlie. Mr. Leander sent me to meet you. You are the t. s.?"

"Yes, Charlie," Dan said.

"Very well. Hop in."

Dan hoisted himself into the gyro and sat down beside the creature. He watched in fascination as delicately formed claws at the end of reed-like arms manipulated the controls that sent the gyro sweeping upward in a wild curve.

"Don't worry," Charlie said. "I'm a good pilot. My eyes cannot register shape like yours do, but they can register distance and velocity far more accurately. Have you seen creatures like me before?"

"Of course, Charlie," Dan said. "The Creator is impartial. He makes as many races with your qualities of perfection, as races with my qualities of perfection."

"He is universal in his perfection," Charlie said. "But unfortunately his creatures are universal in their imperfection. We have trouble here."

"So I gather," Dan said, studying the earnest bead-crusted eye as large

as half a grapefruit. "What's it about?"

"You will see," Charlie said. "For myself, I feel a great sympathy for your race. But others don't. You will see."

PAUL LEANDER was colony-born. A trifle short at seven feet two inches of height, but a good man. The reports said so, and Dan's first impression of the man said so.

"Glad you're here," he said simply. "I could have looked into the trouble myself, but the natives can't understand a man who steps out of his position. It's the insect type of mind, you know. They believe a man is bred from before birth for his job, the same as they are."

"I know," Dan said. "Give me your ideas on it. Do you think the chrome bars are being stolen and sold to some renegade outfit?"

"Frankly, I don't know. My men haven't been able to find out where the theft occurs. They spot supervise, you know. That's all they can do. We have over a million native workers. There are only ten of us."

"So the catalogue says," Dan said.

"Your office is next to mine," Leander said. "You'll find blueprints and maps of the entire layout there. The men and the natives know you're here. As t. s. you'll have complete run of everything. The natives will accept you as a sort of army insect with the right to go anyplace. Don't forget, however, to grease your coveralls with the grease in the top drawer of your desk. It's odorless to us, but when you go into the refineries and the electrovat buildings where the natives have low intelligence, you have to have it for them to accept you. It's officer-odor paste."

An hour later he left the office building and began his tour of inspection. Around him spread out the vast

acres of buildings of the ore refineries and electro-smelters. One squat building he recognized as the atom power-plant, the source of power for the vast amount of electricity necessary to de-oxidize the chrome and at the same time keep the mixture at almost sun heat in each vat.

Roughly twenty miles away, the plain on which the mining property rested ended in the foothills of a mountain range that lifted twenty thousand feet, the upper fifteen thousand feet being black streaked with the white of glaciers. Neither native nor human had explored those heights, nor would they ever. It was suicide.

He consulted the map he had brought along with him, and headed toward the nearest storage building. Inside was a hive of activity. Natives by the hundreds swarmed over the place, some of them carrying bars of gleaming chrome metal, others in janitorial tasks or seemingly just wandering around doing nothing.

This activity continued for several seconds after he entered the building. Then, abruptly, all motion stopped. A shrill screaming hum began, and grew to such intensity that the dust particles on the floor danced to the vibration.

AS ABRUPTLY, the natives began encircling him, their darting movement almost faster than the eye could follow.

He leaped toward the door he had just come through. An insect blocked his way. Sharp mandibles flashed at him. With desperate speed he caught at them and broke them off, flinging them at the others in his way.

The insects piled over him, layers deep, trying to bear him down by sheer weight. He reached the door and fell through it, twisting in a rolling motion and flailing with his arms.

In seconds that seemed like eternities it was over, and he stood outside the building, panting from the exertion.

Leander came running from the office building, a portable flame thrower under his arm.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

"The odor-paste," Dan snapped. "And you know it. Nothing else would make them try to kill me."

"What—" Leander began, puzzled. He stopped.

"That paste was from the perspiration fat of another group," Dan said. "It had to be. And it couldn't have been an accident."

"But there are no other native groups in this valley," Leander said earnestly. "It would have to come from beyond the mountains circling this valley."

"Then it did," Dan said. "Let's get back to the office. I've got to get rid of this smell, and it'll take alcohol, then carbon tetra."

In the office building he slipped out of his clothes and emptied the pockets. Leander stood by in an attitude of helpless impotence.

"This odor-paste won't keep more than a month at a time," Dan said. "Who's been over the mountains in the past month?"

"None of us humans," Leander said.

"And none of the natives could enter a strange colony and gather this perspiration fat," Dan said.

"That's why I can't understand it," Leander said. "It's impossible. It must have been something else that made the natives attack you. It's got to be."

"It can't be," Dan snarled. "Some human brought this here. Who's been here in the past month?"

"No one...except..." Leander's voice trailed off.

"Who?" Dan persisted.

"Well, he certainly wouldn't have done it," Leander said. "The only one who's been here in the past month was the old man himself!"

DECCA, SECOND of the outer planets, swept by endemism, its jagged airless surface bleak and uninviting. Underneath that surface, Dan knew, was a world of labyrinthian wonders and underworld oceans interconnected by subterranean passages in which teemed three intelligent races of delicately molded sea creatures, pink of flesh and incredibly complex in body structure. His own employer, Centauri Cartel, owned all territory rights there. He was not landing, but using Decca as a peg for his trajectory toward Ondecca, third of the outer planets, though it could hardly be called planet-sized since its diameter was just under a thousand miles.

Dan read the trouble sheet for the hundredth time, frowning in deep thought over ways in which Conrad Matheson could lay a trap for him.

The trouble reported was sabotage. Ondecca, an airless planetoid of almost negligible gravity, was one vast factory for the manufacture of spacecrafts of all types. Flycatchers of creatures worked there. Two were exoskeletal, one was reptilian, and the other two were the human and the quintan, the only intelligent warm-blooded race in the Centaurian system. And Dan knew what that meant. Intense jealousies and equally intense loyalties and even more intense accusations.

It would be almost impossible to find the trouble, lay the blame, and not create anarchy on Ondecca. Yet that was what he was expected to do. The job should have been assigned to a group of experts. Perhaps even representatives of each race appointed

by their own planetary governments should have been sent to the trouble spot. Dan knew that was what should be done. Why hadn't it?

Maybe the trouble was phoney, just as the trouble at Nono could very well have been phoney. The natives there had been stealing some of the chrome bars and hiding them. Senseless, since they couldn't use them or market them. Matheson was loved by all his workers of all races. Wherever he went he mixed and made friends. It would be easy for him to slip among the various races of workers and give orders to sabotage work and create situations in which Dan could be killed or made to look silly or cowardly.

Or the trouble could be genuine, and he was being sent because Matheson thought it would be too much for him to tackle. Or, Matheson could be on the level in spite of the evidence to the contrary. He could be testing Dan's metal to see if he was a worthy prospective son-in-law.

The thing was, Dan knew, that he had to come through. If he didn't he could tuck his tail between his legs and head for parts unknown—if he didn't get killed first.

He grinned mirthlessly. If Matheson wanted a son-in-law who could stand up to him, he was going to find he had one. If, on the other hand, he didn't want a son-in-law at all, and was determined to destroy everyone who aspired to be one, he would find that here was one Joe who didn't take destroying sitting down...

THE GENERAL superintendent was Joel Auer. He was a quick decisive man to whom Dan took an instant liking. He had things ready to present a comprehensive picture of the sabotage, or at least its results.

"Here, here, and here," he said, pointing on blueprints, "are the parts

that must be coordinated if a ship is to be operated safely. They must be aligned with the functional axis of the ship. For example, here are the rocket tubes. If they are out of line a fraction of a degree, there is a side-vector to the thrust that makes accurate flight impossible. And here are the gyros. Unless they are exactly at the center of mass of the ship, an effect is produced which is called ship dwell, which makes the ship have a secondary spin like a top running down.

"All these things are adjusted to the nth degree before the ship ever leaves the plant. It's done by the testing building under such precise conditions that thousands of tons of ship are balanced to within a minute fraction of an ounce. Navigation instruments are lined up with the ship's axis so accurately, the ship can deadstick on autopilot through any trajectory design for a lightyear's distance and not miss a dead target the size of a dime. That's why Matheson ships have gained their reputation of being the most reliable ever made."

Joel Auer looked at Dan and came to the point quietly. "The last ten ships to leave on their test run developed gyro dwell, and then pushed it to the point of tearing the gyro units from their moorings and wrecking the ships. The gyros were placed out of balance, and the navigation instruments were out of line with the axis."

"And you think it had to be done deliberately?" Dan asked.

"Yes," Joel Auer said. "Either the test crew didn't do its work, or something was done to the ships after they were OK'd for flight and before they took off."

"What's your opinion?" Dan asked.

Auer smiled. "I can't afford to have one on this."

Dan studied the superintendent.

Was there something lurking in back of his smile? Was this whole thing a frame to make him look silly? Ten ships! That would mean a loss of anywhere from ten million to a billion dollars! Quite expensive for a build-up...

"What became of those ten ships?" he asked.

"Nine of them lost themselves in space. Spacetugs towed the tenth into a closed orbit around Ondecca. I suppose you'll want to go up and look it over."

"Will you come with me?" Dan asked.

Auer frowned. "Frankly, no. I'd much rather you went alone. If you find anything, I don't want any of my men placed in the position of having possibly aided you. It would create hostilities. You're the t.s. You're expected to gather your evidence and turn it over to the home office for action."

"I see," Dan said. And suddenly he was sure he knew what the setup would be this time. Matheson hadn't liked the successful way he handled the Nono trouble. He was out to murder his prospective son-in-law in cold blood and make it look like the work of saboteurs.

He turned and left the super's office. Outside, he looked up through the transparent roof of the administration station, and after a while he saw the silver shape of the ship come into view. A thousand miles overhead, it was almost too small to make out, but there was no mistaking it. What kind of a trap had been set for him up there? He smiled a tight smile. There was only one way to find out.

IT LAY THERE, a hundred yards away, stationary in space relative to his own sleek craft, its surface glistening and unscarred by the pit-

ting of hot atmosphere and the microscopically fine crystals of space. Eighteen hundred feet long and four hundred feet in diameter at its thickest part. A cargo-passenger liner for the interstellar lines, and worth six hundred million dollars.

Had it really been sabotaged? The various parts that made up the drive—the navigation, the balance, the maneuverability—thrown out of alignment after they had been passed by the inspectors? Dan shook his head. Matheson would never have gone that far. Or would he?

Dan looked down at Ondecca, a thousand miles below, with its surface studded with hundreds of circular walls that enclosed the factories, the smelters, the offices, and the residences of five unlike intelligent races. Where the light of the sun struck them just right, they looked like the ends of tubes that protruded from the planet. Others looked like moon craters, as indeed they had been until their rims were built up and smoothed out to hold the almost invisible roofs of silicone rubber that covered many of them so that they could hold an atmosphere. Looking down there, he could realize that it might be possible for Matheson to sacrifice even a billion dollars' worth of ships for his own purposes. They could be chartered to operating costs, and at most they might lower the dividends to the stockholders by a few cents a share.

It was a strange picture that had been slowly building up in his mind, of a father determined no mere mortal should ever win his daughter, issuing instructions to his employees to sabotage their own work so that finally a trap could be set to destroy in one way or another the one who dared love that daughter. It was a strange thing, but in a way quite typical of colony systems where things were

done on a vast scale, and puny Man was overlord of over seventy different races of intelligent creatures. And, as Dan frowned down on the gigantic industrial empire that was the planet Ondecca, he remembered he was a man who in his youth had come here from Earth in voluntary servitude, he realized that it was typical of Conrad Matheson.

Abruptly he snapped out of his reverie. The auto-pilot of his ship was set on the liner now so that the two ships would stay two or three hundred yards apart. Quickly he slipped into his spacesuit in preparation for crossing the gulf between them.

He started for the airlock, then hesitated. Grimly he came back and took an automatic from the arms locker. Moments later he leaped, feeling for an instant that panic that every spaceman feels when suspended in the void, alone.

With nonderous surety his ship drifted away from him, while in the opposite direction the huge liner bore down on him. He blinked violently until his mind adjusted, and the liner was a stationary thing, while he was falling toward it. The superficial panic left him.

He was going to just miss the spaceliner. He took the fine tube attached to his waist and pointed it in a direction that would correct his flight, and pressed the valve that sent out a high pressure stream of air. It took just a small spurt in the gravity-less environment of space relative to him and the liner.

His eyes were sharply surveying every visible inch of the liner, searching for possible sources of danger. His thoughts were rushing at hyperspeed, sighting every possible angle in search of a potential trap.

And suddenly his eyes widened in surprise. As fast as thought he raised his automatic and pointed it at the

huge ship, firing six times in rapid succession.

And in rapid succession there were six flashes of fire close to the shell of the ship.

He poised stationary relative to the ship now, due to the recoil action of the six shots. Sweat at the narrowness of his escape beaded his forehead.

It had been a diabolical trap. Somewhere on the ship a linear accelerator was in operation, shooting electrons into space. The result was that the ship was positively charged, perhaps to a few million electrostatic volts. If he had fallen much closer to the ship the free electrons in his own body would have arced across to the ship. He would have been unharmed by that electric arc, but in that instant afterward he would have had an electrostatic charge himself. Like charges repel each other. He would have been repelled from the giant liner with such force that he would have shot out into space, perhaps never to be found!

"GOD!" HE muttered shakily.

It was going to be a ticklish job maneuvering back to his own ship now. Without the gun it would have been impossible. Using his oxygen in any quantity for repulsion would have provided a conductor so that he would arc across to the highly charged liner.

And on the report sheet, if that happened, his being lost in space would be laid down to stupidity! In a way it was stupid to leave one's ship. But by doing things the way he had, he was keeping the orbit of the liner from being disturbed. And Matheson had known he would do things the way he had.

Now, all he had to do was return to his own ship and shoot out the magnetic grapple. It would hold, and

the two ships could be drawn together by rolling the grapple cable back onto its winch.

He contorted himself so as to get the automatic pointed correctly for-recoil toward his ship.

"Dan Adams!" The voice erupted into his ears from the earphones of his suit radio. It was Conrad Matheson's voice! It was harsh, with no pretense of friendliness.

"Yes?" Dan said calmly, twisting around to search for the source of the voice.

"You can see me by looking almost directly at Alpha," Matheson said.

Dan turned to squint at the nearer of the two suns. After a moment his eyes adjusted, and he saw the silhouette of a spacesuit-clad figure. There was something else. A gun similar to his own.

"I see you now," Dan said tonelessly.

"I'm going to kill you, Dan," Matheson said. "You didn't fall for the trap I set for you, but they'll think the same things anyway. They'll come up to investigate and find your ship unmanned and set on the liner. They'll discover someone 'forgot' to shut off a linear accelerator. They'll assume you arced and shot off into space just as you would have done if you hadn't discovered the trap. By the way, what made you suspect?"

Dan watched the figure coming toward him, keeping always in the sun so that it would blind him to keep watching it. Matheson was still too far away for a sure shot, and it had to be one shot, because once he fired, he would shoot away from the recoil.

Dan risked a look about him and saw his own danger. Where he was now, if he fired the recoil would send him toward the liner. He took the tube at his waist and pointed it sideways, releasing enough air to send him out

of line with the ship.

"You never had any intention of permitting me to marry Doris, did you, sir?" Dan said calmly.

"Of course not!" Matheson said. "You're not the first punk that thought the way to wealth was to marry the daughter and sole heir of Conrad Matheson."

"Did it ever occur to you that one of them might be marrying her because he loved her?" Dan asked.

THERE WAS a harsh laugh. "Don't give me any of that silly namby-pamby. A woman might marry for love, but no man would in Doris' case." There was another laugh, low and dry, the laugh of a man who is coming in for the kill and enjoying it.

"Nothing will stop you?" Dan asked. "I have a gun myself, you know."

"That makes it more interesting," Matheson said. "I'm in the sun. I'm experienced at space duelling. You don't stand a chance."

"I wouldn't say that," Dan said, risking a glance to the side to make sure he was out of the way of the electrically-charged spaceliner. "Or maybe you're right. Maybe I don't stand a chance. If you kill me I'm lost in space, probably to burn to a crisp as my corpse rushes through the atmosphere of some planet, or smashed beyond recognition or any chance to prove there's a bullet hole in me when I strike some asteroid. If I kill you—" He stopped abruptly.

"If you kill me?" Matheson mocked.

"I would have to tell Doris," Dan said. "I could never marry if I killed you. And of course I can see now that you will never give your consent for anyone to marry her."

"That makes it interesting, doesn't it?" Matheson said. "You're intelli-

gent. You see all the angles. But there's one you've missed. If you agree to break off with Doris, quit your job, and leave the Centauri System, I'll let you live. That's my final offer and you have exactly one minute to make up your mind, because in one minute I'll be close enough to shoot without missing."

"I don't need a minute," Dan said. "Here!" He tossed his gun away from him.

"Then you agree to give up Doris and leave the System?" Matheson said.

"I didn't say that," Dan said. "You have me in a position where I can't win. I won't run. I've placed it squarely in your lap. You can murder me in cold blood. If you don't, I assure you I'm going to continue working for you and doing too good a job—in spite of your efforts to sabotage me—for you to fire me. I'm going to put you on a spot where you will have to give your consent for me to marry Doris, or admit that you refuse to let her marry under any circumstances. When that time comes, Doris and I can take it to court and have you overruled. So, if you can live with murder, go ahead and shoot." He looked across the dozen yards of space into the grim mask of a face and the slitted eyes of Conrad Matheson, waiting for death.

It didn't come. Instead Matheson's features remained unchanging for a moment. Then a slight quirk stole into one corner of his mouth, spreading until it became a broad grin. His whole manner changed.

"You've come through, Dan," he said. "You've done what I wanted you to do. You've got the guts it takes to be head of the Matheson Corporation, and that's what I had to make sure of in a son-in-law." His eyes flicked toward the surface of Ondecca.

"They're watching down there. Right now the word is spreading that the old man has at last found a son-in-law that has the guts to take his place."

DAN STARED at him, confused. "I—I don't get it. They were watching? Then—you weren't going to kill me under any circumstances?"

"Of course not," Matheson said. "This whole setup was a frame from the beginning. You thought that odor-paste was from the bodies of natives in another colony on Nono. It wasn't. The natives had orders to attack you, but not hurt you—to make it look like a plot to kill you. And there has been no sabotage. No wrecked ships. Directly in line with Alpha so you can't see it, is my own cruiser with its crew ready. If you had walked into the trap, they would have let you drift long enough to break you down completely, and then they'd have picked you up. If you had shot at me—well, I took that chance. But it's all over now." He waved his arm in a signal for the ship hidden in the disc of the sun to come pick them up. "And I'm damn glad, son."

Dan didn't answer. His face remained expressionless as the ship appeared.

"Your job's over for now," Matheson said. "One of the crew can take your boat down. Us, we're heading back for home—and Doris. She's waiting for you, boy. And praying you've come through. Come on, Dan, cheer up. Don't look so serious."

Dao shook his head. "If it's all the same to you, sir, I'll take my ship to home base myself. I'm resigning and asking Centauri Cartel for my old job back. You can tell Doris—"

"What are you saying?" Matheson broke in. "You're out of your mind! You've won the girl you love and the

Matheson Empire besides. You're not throwing that away!"

Dan shook his head again. "I am," he said. "I was going to marry the girl I loved. Not the Matheson Empire. In my books, I was expecting a girl who loved me enough to live on my salary with Centauri. I loved her enough to change jobs and sacrifice my career, if that's what you laid down as the price of your consent. But—I don't know quite how to express it—but suddenly I can't stomach the idea of a girl who loves me letting me be 'tested' to see if I'm worthy of her. You can tell her—my last words for her were—to hell with it. Give me your gun so I can get to my ship."

He took the automatic from unresisting fingers. Matheson's eyes were glazed over with surprise and shock.

"MR. CARTER will see you now, Mr. Adams."

Dan rose nervously and went toward the Sett-mahogany door. The personnel chief had been very cold toward him and told him he would have to clear with the exit interviewer before he could return to work. If... And he had let it hang there threateningly.

He twisted the knob and pushed open the door. Carter was already out from behind his desk and advancing to meet him, a broad smile on his face.

Dan looked down at him awkwardly, feeling the difference in their heights.

"So you're back," Carter said. "Come in and sit down and tell me about it. What happened?"

"I didn't like the setup," Dan said. "You aren't marrying Matheson's daughter?"

Dan shook his head.

"Well," Carter said impatiently, "did you find out what happened to those other men?"

"Yes," Dan said, sitting down. "They agreed to leave the Centauri System."

"Don't be so damn uncommunicative!" Carter said. "Did you agree to leave the System too?"

Dan smiled. "Does it look like it?"

The phone rang. "Just a minute," Carter excused himself. Dan sat silent, waiting. Carter listened. From time to time, his eyes went to Dan silently, then looked down at the surface of the desk. When he hung up, he began pacing the floor without talking, a dark scowl on his face. Dan watched with a sinking feeling. It looked like he wasn't going to get his old job back. He would have to leave the System after all. Bitterness welled up within him. He shoved it down with an effort and kept his features expressionless.

Abruptly, Carter stopped his pacing and turned to Dan. "That call was about you," he said. "I'm going to make you an offer. You can take it or leave it. You can be reinstated in your old job and with all your priorities and benefits so that it's just as if you had never quit. But you have to return your severance pay check, and you have to sign a ten-year contract."

Dan was on his feet. "Good!" he said. "Where's the contract? I'll sign right now."

"And your severance pay?" Carter asked.

Dan took out his billfold and extracted the check. He grinned. "I never cashed it."

Carter took the check and glanced at it, then put it in a drawer. "I'll have my secretary type out the contract while we wait."

THE SECRETARY came in with her shorthand book. After she had gone, Dan and Tom Carter sat in

silence. A few minutes later the phone rang.

"Yes?" Carter said. He stiffened. His eyes darted to Dan. "OK," he said. He hung up slowly, his eyes going toward the door.

Dan turned as the door burst open. Matheson came in, a determined glint in his eyes. Behind him was Doris. There was an equally determined glint in her eyes.

"All right, Dad," she said. "Tell him."

"I came to apologize, Dan," Matheson said. "And to tell you the truth. Doris didn't know about the testing. Neither with you nor with those others. I worked it so she thought they just turned yellow or stopped loving her. She had nothing to do with it."

Dan looked at Doris and saw that it was the truth. He looked back at Matheson. There was incredible strength of will there. Intense pride. But with it was something else.

The door opened again. The secretary came in and laid several sheets of paper on Carter's desk, then went out, glancing curiously at Doris.

"Well," Carter said goodnaturedly, "I guess I might as well tear up this contract."

"No," Dan said calmly. He looked at Matheson, then at Doris. With a half smile, he stood up and went to the desk. He picked up the pen and held it poised while he glanced over the contract.

He started to sign it, and there was a sobbing sound, sharply cut off, from Doris.

"I guess that's that," Matheson said heavily. "Come on, Doris."

"I've signed it now, Mr. Carter," Dan said. "Does that make it binding?"

"It does," Carter said.

"OK," Dan said. He turned to Matheson and Doris. "Now," he said,

"Doris, do you still want to marry me?"

"Oh, yes, Dan." Her eyes lit up, then turned to her father questioningly.

"Do you play it my way?" Dan said to Matheson.

A smile twisted onto the strong lips of Conrad Matheson.

Doris and Dan didn't wait for a verbal answer. They were in each other's arms, gazing into each other's

eyes, when, "No!" It was Matheson's voice, angry, sharp. They jerked around in surprise.

Carter had the contract in his hands, about to tear it up. He was looking at Matheson in surprise.

Matheson went forward and took the contract out of Carter's hands and laid it on the desk.

"We'll play it Dan's way," he said. There was intense pride in his next words. "He's my son."



INSECTICIDE — insecticide — what's the difference as long as you're healthy!" might be the comment of the common fly or the battle cry of the insect world! The much-vaunted wonder-drugs of science are taking a beating at the "hands" of the insect world. Science has received a setback and the old fly-swatter is once more in demand. It appears that the general conclusion of researchers is that the present-day insecticides so recently discovered and used with such apparent effect, have really been merely temporary barriers to the march of insects, particularly the common fly.

Nature builds well and she is adaptable

above all things. While for a time the insecticides like DDT and others demonstrate terrific killing power, it requires only a relatively short time before the fly-world produces a hardy strain completely impervious to the death-blow of the chemical. Furthermore, scientists have discovered that among flies the resistance to chemical sprays is passed down through numerous generations even though they may not be exposed to the agent again. One scientist has gone so far as to believe that ultimately flies will develop resistance to all drugs used against them!

It is sad, indeed, to think that technology has been stumped this way. Hey, Maw! Get out the fly-swatter!



THE MEDIUM sized, type "G" star which constitutes the Sun of this Solar system likes to think of itself as a sort of cosmic practical joker, with almost a sadistic glee causing all that trouble among the befuddled inhabitants of the third planet! And just to make it harder, the Sun likes to repeat the troubles at almost cyclic turns. The trouble and joking is, of course, the Sunspots.

These flaring magnetic storms occurring on the surface of the Sun appear at fairly periodic intervals and, since they are basically magnetic and electrical in nature, they throw into space powerful magnetic fields and vast streams of electrons like a gigantic vacuum tube. As far as the engineers

of Earth are concerned, the results are horrid. Communications on Earth depending on radio especially, but also on long land-lines and cables, get a terrific jolt. The electrical and magnetic effects play hob with communications. In fact, because of Sunspots alone, much communication equipment must be made dozens of times better—and better shielded—than if they didn't exist.

Interspace radio, when the day of the space ship comes, will be interfered with severely by these Sunspot disturbances, a matter which scientists are already considering. The possible solution seems to be to avoid the wave-lengths on which the Sun broadcasts but, unfortunately, magnetic fields have no wavelength!



THE TWO-HUNDRED-inch telescope isn't much in the news these days—and for a very good reason. Astronomers using the gigantic instrument are embarked on an exhaustive program to determine (if they can) the limitations of the Universe. The telescope is capable of reaching some two or three hundred million light years into space! Ignoring the nearer stars, astronomers are interested in determining whether or not the stellar system thins out toward the fringes of this radius. In other words, is there a limit?

Viewed with ordinary instruments, the stellar arrangement seems to be pretty regular, and no apparent diminution in density of stars is noticeable. Yet it is difficult to imagine that the stars go on without end. It is reasonable to assume that the Cosmos is finite. To determine this, the astronomical program calls for a detailed

charting and analysis of the fringes' stellar systems. Along with the charting of the stars and their positions, note is made of relative velocities in order to find out whether the Universe is expanding, contracting or preserving the status quo; despite the theoreticians, this little matter hasn't been settled either.

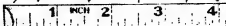
Presumably, when this program has been completed the two-hundred-incher will be turned to the more prosaic charting of the Solar System, though astronomers don't take very kindly to this idea. They feel the time of the tool is so precious that every moment of its use must be allotted to stellar work. Let the smaller 'scopes take care of the Solar System, is the general attitude of the astronomer. Those of us who take the more immediate view that Man will soon be in or out in the Solar System are inclined to think this rather shortsighted.

MARTIANS

BY THE INCH



By Sandy Miller



NO READER of science-fiction can deny that the "flying saucer" phenomenon stirred up the public consciousness of s-f as nothing else has ever done. Unfortunately the efforts of some to purvey these facts of observation in terms of planetary invaders and in general to promote every conceivable sort of a hoax has done the s-f fan a disservice, tending to make him appear to many a crack-pot, especially in light of the logical explanations offered by genuinely disinterested scientific observers.

Imaginative ability is a wonderful thing—all s-f readers share it to a great extent,—but it is one thing to be imaginative and another to be hoaxed and bamboozled by self-styled scientists. Unfortunately for s-f there has been too much of this lately.

The most recent deviation from the realm of the senses is Heard's "Another World Watches." In this remarkable opus, we are told in great detail all about the Martians, their flying saucers and the observations they are making on Earth! To begin with the Martians are insects like bumble-bees,

a few inches long and endowed with miraculous visual abilities and technological skills. Their vehicles are flying saucers ranging in size from feet to thousands of feet, powered by gravitational waves (whatever they are), and they are studying the inhabitants of the Earth. The Moons of Mars are not satellites but artificial observational platforms upon which the Martians study their own planet. The Martians even have crystalline power plants which produce enormous amounts of electric power through our familiar piezo-electric effect (in which the squeezed or pressed crystal delivers a voltage and a current).

Now how is an s-f fan, reader, or interested person to regard these tales? Obviously in only one way, in the same way he regards Velikovsky's theories, or, say, dianetics. True, these matters are controversial, but somewhere, someplace the line must be drawn between fact and fantasy and when fantasy is presented as observational fact, then the scientist must rise up in honest ire!



When they found Diane's body, the marks on her throat told them what had happened....



By Paul W. Fairman

Certain death disguised as a giant snake lurked on this space ship. But a visible danger isn't always the most deadly . . .

DAVIS, SKIPPER of the Orion—out of the asteroids for Terra—was drinking coffee in the chart room when Connors brought him the news. After listening, with no change of expression, Davis said, "Better sit down, son. And you'll find a bottle of brandy in that left-hand drawer. Take three fingers and compose yourself."

Connors' face was the color of old ashes. His hand shook as he reached toward the drawer. Then, from pure reflex, he drew the hand back quickly.

Davis got to his feet, smiling briefly and without humor, "Don't worry. You won't find it in there. Only the

brandy bottle."

Still, Connors opened the drawer in gingerly fashion and peered inside before availing himself of the brandy. His arm trembled and, as he poured, the liquor splashed onto the table.

The skipper ignored Connors' pitiful nervousness and began pacing the floor. He was a handsome, gray-haired man whose very appearance spoke of precision. His short, clipped speech verified this.

"First things first," he said, "so let's take stock. The Plutonian thinks it happened sometime between the thirteenth and the eighteenth hour?"

"That's—that's right, sir."

Davis pursed his lips, considering. "We are still three days out of Terran gravity. We have five passengers besides a crew of eight, and four men for the cargo. That make it very bad—especially the passengers."

"Very bad, sir."

Davis turned his gray eyes upward and surveyed the ceiling. Over a dozen pipe lines of various thicknesses ran through one wall, passed over his head, and disappeared into the next.

"Every ceiling in the craft a mass of pipes," he mused. "That's doubly bad. A worse setting for such a thing couldn't be devised."

"What—what are we going to do, sir? Notify the crew and the passengers?"

"The four cargo men no doubt know already. That Plutonian would have told the other three."

"But only because they're Plutonians, too. He wouldn't speak to any of the crew except me. As Cargo Master, I'd be the man to notify."

"My first instinct is to inform only picked members of the crew—those not given to panic. And the passengers—no."

"But sir! Isn't that cruel? Inhuman? They should be given a chance for their lives."

Davis continued to pace the floor in measured strides. "Faced with a situation such as this, Connors, a man is hard put to decide the really human thing to do. I certainly don't want to precipitate a panic." He made two more turns across the room. "Let's see—on the passenger list we have that couple Mr. and Mrs. Dane; the widow, Mrs. Norbet; and those two importers, Friedlinger and Blair. Of the whole lot, I consider Friedlinger to be the only really stable individual."

"And the crew?"

"You'd better call the crew in immediately."

LEWIS DANE hurried along the companionway of the Orion toward the cabin he shared with Diana, his wife. Dane was a big man, a full two hundred and seventy-five pounds, very little of which was other than bone and muscle. He had a deceptively childlike face, large and without guile.

Upon that face now was a mixture of fear and elation. He walked carefully upon the balls of his feet, and continuously kept his eyes on the pipes under which he walked. He did not bother to announce his entrance into the cabin by knocking. Rather, he barged in without ceremony.

This brought a gasp and a quick movement from his pretty wife. Diana Dane whirled. She had just removed her dress. She held it now, close to her body. Anger flamed in her face.

"Lewis! You could have the decency to knock! You scared me almost to death."

Dane glanced at the piped ceiling, then dropped his bulk into a chair. His pink face showed surprise. "I'm sorry, my dear. Rude of me. But at the same time I can't help wondering."

"Wondering at what?"

"Whether or not you'd have been so hasty in covering yourself if someone else—say Friedlinger—had entered in my place."

The girl's face flamed. Words were poised to pour out. But she controlled herself and was finally able to speak in a controlled tone. "I shouldn't let your beastliness bother me, Lewis. Heaven knows I've borne the brunt of it long enough to know what to expect from you. There is nothing whatever between Friedlinger and myself. You know that. You're the one who should be ashamed. You and that widow—Helen Norbet."

Dane smiled lazily. Diana had thrown down the dress and—more as a gesture of contempt than anything

else—stood there in the filmiest of undergarments while she placidly adjusted her hair. Dane surveyed her charms with impersonal interest. "She's far more attractive than you are, my dear. She has much finer legs and that—that jaded, worn look is not yet in evidence."

"You—you beast."

"That term grows monotonous. And by the way, do you know where I spent the last sleeping period?"

Diana Dane's manner now reflected the scorn and contempt she held for this man. "Certainly," she said. "In her cabin."

A look of anger came into Lewis Dane's eyes. This was somewhat in the nature of an unmasking. It revealed inherent cruelty behind the makeup of bland honesty. "You knew—and you make no protest?"

HER LOOK of contempt was eloquent. "I don't care what you do, Lewis. I haven't cared for a long time. Your obscenities, your cruelties, have put me far past caring. The thing I can't understand is why the Norbet woman isn't revolted by your touch. You two must be birds of a feather."

Dane's hatred was naked now, but it showed only in his eyes, not in his voice. "Never mind that. And if I disgust you so, you have a way out. I'd be delighted to give you a divorce."

She smiled. "Don't be stupid. You know I won't allow a divorce. It's my one weapon against you. I know you want your freedom more than anything else. I can deprive you of it and I will—as long as I wish to—which will no doubt be quite a while."

Dane stifled his rage with a smile and lounged back in his chair. "Let's forget it for the time being, my dear. That isn't what I came to talk to you about. I bring news."

"What news?"

"No hurry. First, I wonder if you know what the cargo consists of on this ship."

Diana Dane sat down before her dressing table and studied her face. "Animals, I believe. A cargo of zoological specimens for Terran zoos."

"What sort of specimens?"

"How do I know? I haven't been interested enough to inquire. You know I hate animals of all sorts."

"But I am interested in them. I made a point of checking. For instance, one of their prize beasts is a two-headed *sith*. An amazing creature with not one but a pair of savage heads. It's kept in a cage with a half-partition so the heads are separated, because a *sith* has been known to get in a fight with itself and tear itself to pieces."

The girl shuddered. "Lewis! Stop it!"

He saw the shudder and was gratified. "And what is your attitude toward reptiles, my dear?"

She paled perceptibly as she reached for a cream jar.

He chuckled. "They have quite a few reptilian specimens aboard. A half dozen Neptunian snow-flakes, for instance. They are snow-white and live in sub-zero temperatures. They are deadly poison and have teeth strong enough to cut through anything but steel or rock. They are packed in special durillium boxes. I kicked one of the boxes not long ago just to hear them hiss."

"Lewis! Stop it! Or I'll faint. You know how the very thought of a snake affects me."

"No," he said, with an icy touch to his voice. "You won't faint. You'll be polite and listen until I've finished. You see, there is another prize reptile aboard. One of the rarest in the universe. It comes from the asteroids and is sometimes called the snake that

can think like a man. It's about six feet long and two inches in diameter and has the strength of a steel cable. It has a long technical name, but is most commonly called the Strangler Snake."

"Lewis—please!"

HE RUSHED on. "It is probably the most dangerous crawling thing in existence because it can think, and it has only one instinct—to kill—kill—kill."

Dane got up and went to stand over his wife as though in triumph. "This snake has poison fangs, but very seldom uses them. Its favorite method of killing is to drop from an overhead beam or branch and become a hangman's rope—a strangler's noose. It takes two or three turns around its victim's neck and wraps its other end around the support. Then it lifts—and strangles."

Dane whirled on her husband. Her voice was a pathetic plea. "Lewis—don't! Don't. You know what the thought of a snake does to me!"

He went back and sat down, grinning. "I'm sorry, my dear. I was quite carried away. You see, snakes fascinate me. We're quite different in that respect."

"Don't say any more about them—please."

"I won't. Except for one more thing. There is a Strangler Snake loose aboard this ship."

A full minute of dead silence passed before Diana Dane whispered, "No—not! That's absurd. It's impossible!"

"On the contrary. It's a fact. I was passing the chart room and saw the Cargo Master rush in there. I stopped to listen. It seems the snake is in the charge of one of the Plutonians brought aboard to watch the animals. The creature discovered one of the hinges on its cage was weak and it

exerted pressure ceaselessly until it broke the spring. I told you a Strangler Snake can think like a man. It has disappeared completely."

Diana Dane slowly raised her head. Eyes wide and fixed, she stared at the overhead pies. Her throat worked, and Lewis Dane was gratified at the suffering he witnessed. "This fear of snakes," he said softly, "it's inherent in your family, isn't it? Your mother was the same way, I understand."

The girl sprang from the bench before the dressing table. She was like a statue coming suddenly to life. She screamed, flung open the door and ran from the cabin.

Lewis Dane gazed after her in mild surprise. "My dear," he called. "You forgot to put on your clothes."

DIANA DANE lay upon a lounge in the chart room. A coverlet had been thrown over her. Her eyes were closed and she breathed evenly.

The skipper stood by the desk, sternly eyeing the huge Lewis Dane who stood nearby, somewhat after the manner of a school boy awaiting punishment.

"I called you here for an explanation," Davis said in an iced voice. "Your wife rushed into the room hysterical, almost out of her mind from terror."

"It has to do with that escaped Strangler Snake. She has a phobia relative to reptiles. The thought of a Strangler hiding somewhere among the pipes—"

"She told me word of it came from you—that you eavesdropped outside that door when Connors reported to me."

"It wasn't necessary to eavesdrop. Anyone walking down the companionway could have heard him."

"Why did you find it necessary to terrorize your wife?"

Dane was not to be reprimanded or brow-beaten. "Captain, aren't you being a little childish? Or should I say dictatorial. Sudden death is stalking this ship. At any moment, one of those aboard could die horribly. Haven't we, therefore, the right to know the truth? To give ourselves what protection we can manage?"

"Mr. Dane—I am captain of this ship. We are faced with an emergency and from this moment on we are under Martial Law. You'll follow my orders or go into irons!"

Dane shrugged. "Of course, Captain. I'll—"

There was a quick tap on the door, followed immediately by the entrance of Freidlinger. He was a small, bright-eyed man with a goatee and a professorial air about him. "Is something wrong? I thought I heard a woman screaming."

Davis' shoulders sagged a trifle. He looked suddenly older and more tired. "A woman did scream, Mr. Freidlinger. If you'll just take a chair, I'll have the rest of the passengers called in. I might as well tell everyone at once."

Connors was summoned and went about the business of gathering the passengers. Blair arrived first, wearing a suit that had never felt the touch of a pressing iron. Davis brushed off his questions and bade him be seated.

Heavy silence filled the room as the skipper paced back and forth. Finally, Freidlinger lost patience.

"I say, Captain, what sort of—"

He stopped speaking as Connors opened the door and entered. Obviously, the Cargo Master was not up to emergencies. He was even more pale than before and he seemed unsure of his balance as he closed the door and stood clutching the knob. His voice was a harsh whisper: "Captain—Captain! Mrs. Norbet is dead! Strangled!"

Freidlinger sprang to his feet. "What in all hell—"

"Sit down, sir," Davis snapped. "That's an order! All of you—stay right where you are until I get back. Come, Connors."

The two officers left the chart room and hurried down the companionway toward the rear cabin deck.

"What room number?"

"Eight, sir. Her own room. The door was locked. I broke it open. I found her lying on the floor."

A FEW MOMENTS later, Davis was bending over the dead body of a very beautiful woman; or rather, a woman who had been very beautiful in life. She lay at a grotesque angle, as though she had fallen limp as a rag doll from a suspended position.

Davis noted the three angry-red circles about her slim throat—circles which were even now darkening into blue.

Connors stood by helplessly. "They say it has almost human intelligence," he mouthed.

"And a diabolical hatred for any living thing."

"They say a captured Strangler can identify the man who snared it out of a dozen other men. That it will even trail its captor across great distances."

Davis raised his eyes to the pipes overhead; voiceless expressionless pipes. But terrible in their ominous blankness.

"The thing strikes like lightning," Connors said. "A silver flash coming down from the ceiling; nothing but a streak and then a broken neck. I'll bet she never knew what hit her."

The skipper got to his feet and scowled at Connors. "If you don't get hold of yourself, sir, I'll have to take steps. I'm afraid you aren't the man for your job."

Connors reddened and made an hon-

est effort to do as he was ordered. "Sorry, sir. I'll be more careful."

"See that you are. Have the necessary done for this poor unfortunate. I'm going back to the chart room."

BLAIR SAID, "I think the main point is the utterly criminal negligence involved in allowing the horror to escape its cage. When we reach Terra, I shall certainly sue this line—"

"If you reach Terra," Freidlinger said with a wry smile. "I'll grant you an investigation should be made, but that won't help us now. At this very moment we have a deadly reptile hiding somewhere among those pipes—hiding and waiting. A killer-snake which has been proved to have a memory, a terrible thirst for inflicting death, and a mind capable of plotting a pattern of action."

Davis paced the floor. Blair looked startled. Dane looked at his prone wife and said, "From what I've heard, you're right about this thing having a brain. From what I've heard of it, the reptile could lie back and kill one of us every hour on the hour if the fancy struck it."

"I wonder," Freidlinger said, "if we could devise some sort of a framework to wear around our shoulders—something to keep the reptile from getting a grip on our throats with its coils."

Davis shook his head. "A logical suggestion, if we had only to worry about the strangling angle. But this snake is also as deadly as a Terran cobra, even more so. Thwart it in one manner and it could kill in another."

There was a long moment of silence while, into each man's ears from somewhere in the darkness above the pipes, there seemed to come a voiceless whisper: *I have you. I have all of you. Squirm and twist and plan as you may, I'll corpse you every one.*

Blair was picking haphazardly at some lint on his jacket. He caught the

lint between the thumb and finger of his right hand and held it up for inspection. He breathed sharply inward and muttered, "God! Oh God! Can't we do something? Must we all sit here and wait to be strangled?" His voice trebled upward to end in a sort of bleat.

Connors turned on him with what was almost a look of triumph. "We must, above all, maintain a healthy mental attitude." He spoke as though reading the words from a book.

Davis favored him with just a ghost of a smile. "By all means, Connors. By all means."

Freidlinger was openly contemptuous of the quavering Blair. Also, he seemed to have scant regard for the Cargo Master. "Platitudes are very nice; generalities are wonderful. But can't we do something practical? How about instituting a search?"

The skipper shook his head. "The piping cannot be removed. We'd all be killed instantly by live gasses."

Blair said, "Maybe that would be better than—"

His fellow importer silenced him with a gesture. "That may be it—gas. Could we devise any formula to kill the reptile without harming ourselves?"

AGAIN DAVIS shook his head. "I know no such formula. And we have neither the time nor the chemicals to devise one even if we had the knowledge."

"Then it's just a matter of sitting here waiting to die as that woman died?"

"We'll do the best we can."

"Stupid—just plain stupid. In this advanced age of mankind—this time of swift travel from planet to planet—this enlightened era—we must resignedly await death from a snake. It's absurd!" Freidlinger strode toward the door. "I'm going to my cabin."

Davis, slightly ruffled, barked, "You

will wait until you're dismissed, Mr. Freidlinger. From now on everybody aboard this ship obeys my commands."

"If they're intelligent commands, I'm sure I have no objections."

"Thank you. I hope you'll find them so. While we can't hunt down this wily reptile, we can try to defend ourselves to the best of our abilities. Mr. Connors will serve out small heat-ray guns to all the passengers and to some members of the crew. We haven't enough of these weapons to go around completely, so the balance of the crew will be given knives. The Plutonian cargo men are already armed."

"But," Blair said, "this reptile can strike like lightning. Possibly it could get us before we have time to use a heat gun."

"That may be true, so we'll try and guard against it. Every person on the ship will be paired off with another person. From now on we move about as teams. You and Blair, Mr. Freidlinger, will operate as one unit. Neither of you will go anywhere about the ship without the other. You will arrange your hours so that one is always awake while the other sleeps. Every team in the ship will follow the same program. Is that clear?"

"A good idea," Dane said.

"Excellent," Freidlinger agreed.

Blair had already taken a couple of steps in order to be closer to his ship-mate.

"It may be possible," Davis went on, "for the Strangler Snake to get some of us even though we move about in pairs, so it amounts to this: the partner of any future victim must see to it the snake dies also."

"That shouldn't be too difficult," Freidlinger said. "All we have to do is keep our heads."

"Certainly," Connors echoed. "Keep our heads."

"Dane," the skipper said. "You'd

better take your wife to your cabin. I gave her a mild sedative, but she'll be coming out of it soon. Davis will accompany you and stay with you until she awakens. Then signal me and I'll arrange to have two men come for him. Under no circumstances must any of us be alone for a moment."

As the two men left, carrying the sleeping Diana Dane, Captain Davis was signalling crew assembly.

IT WAS a weird ship Captain Davis commanded from that hour onward. An observer unacquainted with the facts would have been completely confounded at seeing the teamwork that went on without surcease. Men moving softly, catlike, through the passageways from cabin to cabin. Heads tilted always upward, these safety teams did not indulge in the luxury of conversation. They spoke only when it was necessary and went around corners back to back, with looks of fear, grimness, or courage, depending upon the mind behind each face.

Hour piled upon hour. Nothing happened. The Strangler Snake, wherever it was, made no move to attack its hated enemies. But more than one of these latter visualized the savage reptile continuously lurking back in its safe darkness. And in many minds was the identical conviction: *It's spotted me. I'm the one it's waiting for. Nobody else. Just me—me—me.*

The body of Helen Norbet was committed to space as was required by interplanetary law. Her still, beautiful form was sewed into a canvas bag and sent out to drift for all eternity through dark void. Captain Davis read the prayer while the crew and passengers stood by, watching the ceiling of the rear port cabin.

"Oh Almighty Father, Creator of land and sea and space, take unto Thyself the soul of Helen Norbet. Though

her body rests forever in endless void, we pray that her immortal soul is even now with Thee in Paradise. Amen."

"Amen."

"Open the inner port."

Compressed air hissed.

"Close inner port."

The great door hove to.

"We commit this body to the infinite arcs of void."

"Amen."

"Open outer port. Eject."

The compressed air was not heard.

"Back to your stations, gentlemen."

TWENTY-FOUR hours passed and the Strangler Snake did not strike. The tension grew, however, until the atmosphere in the ship seemed to twang like a tight bow-string. Tempers shortened. At dinner, Freidlinger snorted an insult at Blair: "I'd almost choose the snake to this quivering bowl of jelly!"

Blair only sulked and looked offended.

Time passed. The Strangler Snake did not strike, but there was another space funeral off the Orion.

It was heralded by a scuffle rearward in the jet-watch. A scuffle—a curse—a cry of agony. Reinforcements rushed to the scene to find Warner, a tube-tester, crouched with a bloody knife over the body of his team-mate. The latter's throat had been ripped across; an insane light glowed in the eyes of the former.

"Stay back," he crooned. "Devil-snake get us—devil-snake get all of us. One by one—two by two—three by three. Everybody dies."

"Get the paralysis gun," Captain Davis said sadly. "The man's gone clean mad."

Several pairs of eyes traveled involuntarily toward the ceiling. Was the Strangler Snake up there somewhere, a grin on its fanged mouth? They said

the snake could think. Did he realize this death was also his?

Thus was a new fear added. Many of the teams now moved about with eyes on the ceiling and each other. One man had cracked under the strain. Possibly he'd shown no signs—given no warning before he turned into a thing full as deadly as the snake itself.

If one man cracked, why not two—three—four?

Why not my partner? He looks pretty weak-minded to me. And he looks to be slipping fast. I'll watch him. If he tries anything, I'll get him first.

It seemed any increased tension was impossible. Yet the tension increased.

And still the Strangler Snake claimed no victim.

"I THINK we're going to make it," the skipper told Connors with Terra a dime-sized spot in the radar screen. "God knows if we do everybody on this ship deserves a medal."

"I hope you're right, sir, about our making it."

Davis did not seem to hear. "It will be a court martial for me, of course." He paused and his mouth grew bitter. "After twenty years on the space lanes. After twenty years without so much as a smashed thumb in my log book—this."

Connors hit his lip. "But, sir, I'm the Cargo Master. It was my responsibility. I won't try to dodge it."

"You'll merely be docked permanently. Drummed out. I'm the master of this vessel. I'm responsible for its safety. The show will feature me."

"Will you lose your pension, sir?"

"Damn my pen—"

The door flew open. Dane staggered into the room. His mouth was slack, his eyes staring in horror. "Come—come. Good God! It's my wife! The snake got her!"

Diana Dane lay crumpled on the

floor some five feet from her bunk. She wore a filmy nightgown, and Davis unconsciously took a sheet from the bunk and lay it over her torso. He knelt to inspect the second set of red marks—marks he had grown to know and to dread. He remained kneeling as Dane babbled out the details of this latest horror.

Dane sat in a chair apparently upon the verge of collapse. "It was my fault—my fault. But everything looked so safe. She was asleep in the lower bunk, well protected from the ceiling pipes and I got hungry—wanted a snack from the kitchen.

Davis raised himself slowly, his eyes grim on Dane as the latter continued: "I wasn't gone for more than two minutes—three at the most. I hurried right back. But she must have awakened just as I went out the door—must have gotten up—taken a couple of steps. That devil-snake was—waiting."

Dane dropped his head into his hands and wept. As Davis drew the sheet over Diana Dane's face, Lewis Dane raised his eyes. "Will—will she be buried in space, skipper?"

"No. We're almost inside gravity. Another hour will have us in our berth."

"Thank God for that! I don't think I could stand it—thinking of her floating out in space."

WITH TERRA rushing up to meet the Orion, Connors was fast regaining his nerve. "Another hour and this ship will be shot full of gas. Somehow, I'd like to be in a place I could watch that reptile die. If it can think, maybe it can suffer."

Dane and a crewman stayed with the body of Diana Dane while the morose and narrow-eyed skipper went back to the chart room. He sent out the required signals and watched a

pair of power-pois come out to steer the mammoth Orion into berth.

The little sky-tugs clamped their grav-plates onto her sides and eased her slowly down into the Chicago port. Davis got the return signal with only half his mind; hardly realized it when he shut off his jets. The land loomed. The hull scraped bottom. They were in.

It was a haggard, red-eyed group of people who walked down the ramp from the open port of the Orion. Word of the disaster had been radioed in, and already the port officials were gathering.

The skyfarers from the Orion walked along the fenced path and stepped into the quarantine area. And the last man to leave the ship was the pale, drawn Captain Davis.

But he did not leave the ramp. Instead he called, "Hold those people. Don't allow them out of quarantine until I return. With that, be about-faced and reentered the ship.

The port closed behind him.

Connors stared aghast. "Has he gone mad? Giving that Strangler another chance at him?"

These men who had been through so much together looked askance at one another. Even the solid Freidlinger was amazed. But, being a practical man, he sought an explanation.

"He is a proud man and feels this disgrace keenly. Possibly more than we realize. I have a feeling we won't see Captain Davis alive."

"Zuficde?" Blair breathed.

"Such a thing is entirely possible when a man like Davis is concerned."

They fell into uneasy silence, staring at the great space-stained hull. At the closed port. And each man was visualizing to himself what went on within.

Was Davis already dead by his own hand? Or had he cracked at last under the strain? Was he stalking that

empty, silent ship in search of the devil-snake? Begging it to come out and face him?

Almost anything, the group decided, could be happening inside the Orion's hull.

DAVIS REAPPEARED in thirty-five minutes. He was a changed man. His shoulders were straighter, his step more alert, his eyes colder and more grim.

And he was dragging behind him the dead body of a six-foot Strangler Snake.

"He went back and got it," muttered the dumbfounded Connors as soon as he could get his jaw back in place. "He went in all alone and killed it!"

Davis came abreast of the quarantine area. He motioned to the guard. "Bring these people into the office of the Port Chief. All of them."

Five minutes later he stood facing the group he'd brought across space from the asteroids. His face was cold. He turned to the waiting Port Chief.

"I wish to correct our radio report. My log will also have to be corrected."

The Port Chief waited, his fascinated eyes on the snake held carelessly in Davis' hand.

"We reported that a dangerous snake had gotten free within the confines of the ship and had killed two passengers. That is not true. The snake did not escape and killed no passengers."

"Then how—?"

"This is the true story: one of my passengers is a murderer. He wished to get rid of two people and devised the most fiendish plot any man could think up."

"Who is the man?"

Davis pointed. "Passenger Lewis Dane. Guard—keep him covered."

Dane exploded into words. "Why,

man—you're insane! It got you just like it got that mad crewman!"

"SILENCE. You'll have a fair trial before they electrocute you." Davis turned to the Port Chief. "I'll tell the thing as it happened and explain my investigations later. Dane, it seemed, wanted to get rid of his wife. He was heard telling this to the other female passenger—the murdered Helen Norbet with whom he got extremely friendly on the trip. Just when he devised the plan I don't know, but he put it into operation by killing the caged Strangler Snake with a whiff of gas from a hand-jet and then prying open the cage in order to make it look as though the snake had broken it from the inside.

"He then hid the snake for his future use and waited for the disappearance to be reported. He heard Connors report the supposed escape to me and then went directly to the cabin of Miss Norbet and used the snake's body to strangle her. You will observe Dane is a big man and would have had no trouble doing the job.

"Then Dane went to his own cabin and—according to her own testimony—sadistically terrorized the wife he hated by telling her of the snake's escape.

"Now, he had only to lie low and time his next murder to his own satisfaction. When he was ready, he strangled his wife in the same manner and came to the chart room to report another killing by the Strangler Snake. Prior to making this report, he hid the body of the snake in the bottom of his valise."

"You're crazy—man! Crazy!"

"I found the snake in his valise."

"It's a frame. A plant."

The Port Chief spoke gravely: "These are serious charges, Captain. Do you mind giving any proof you

have and how you arrived at your conclusions?"

"My first suspicions were too vague to follow up. They sprang merely from a feeling I had about Dane. I think I know men, and Dane is far from a courageous one. Yet not at any time did he show any fright. When far braver men acknowledged their fear."

"Far from conclusive."

"**E**XACTLY. So vague I could not even put it in the form of a definite suspicion. Would to God I had. But when Dane's wife became one of the only two victims the snake claims, my suspicions clarified to the point where I could think of investigating.

"When I went back to the ship, I first searched for and found the reptile's body. Then, with a magnifying glass I checked the bruises on Diana Dane's throat. Broken scales from the snake's body were in evidence. But there is not a sign of any such residue on the pipes in the cabins of either Diana Dane or Helen Norbet. That proves murder. It is a well-known fact a Strangler Snake must have leverage

in order to hang a victim. Without that leverage it can only inflict a fatal bite."

"I say you're crazy. Say I did want to kill my wife. Why would I kill Helen Norbet? I hardly knew the girl."

"No? I made a checkup by radio with some newspapers while I was in the Orion. You knew her very well. In fact, you were bigamously married to her and she was blackmailing you."

Dane's shoulders sagged. But he was still game. He put a grin on his face. "That's your story. You'll have to prove it in court."

"I don't think we'll have any trouble. Not with your finger prints on the jimmied snake cage—and on the jet gun I found in the pipes over the animal hold. And when scrapings are taken from under your fingernails, I'm sure we'll find residue from the hide of the Strangler Snake."

Dane glanced down guiltily at his hands.

"Don't move!" The guard warned.

Dane did not move. Only his shoulders sagged lower.

THE END

THOSE GHOSTLY

By Merritt Linn

BLOBS...

TELEVISION and radar technicians have run into a peculiar problem which is now the object of much study. It is the mystery of the "blobs." For a long time it has been observed that the ordinary atmosphere is capable of causing a great deal of distortion and interference in these services, though ordinary radio waves are unaffected. In an effort to locate the trouble, the explorers have come up with the realization that the eddy currents in air, the variable density and humidity spots of air as they vary from one point to another, give rise to these effects. Picturesquely the disturbances have been named "blobs."

Blobs affect radar and television waves

because they are so short. It is basic that such effects occur when the interfering object has a physical size of the same order as the wave-length being used. Ordinary radio waves are long and the blobs cause a "interference."

These "dielectric variations", a more scientific name for blobs, will be useful as well as harmful, for through them a great deal can be learned in meteorology. Much information on the exact point-to-point constitution of the air can be gathered with radio apparatus. It is suspected that the blobs have much to do with the vagaries of TV reception—and until now there has been little in the way of a logical explanation. It's nice to know, at least, who's robbing you!



An invisible hand seemed to have taken control of the ship. For what purpose?

The Joker

BY WILLIAM MORRISON

Everybody at one time or another has had to squelch a practical joker. But how do you cope with one the size of infinity?

THE FIRST time it happened, a cold perspiration broke out on Dyson's forehead. The second time, his body seemed so completely paralyzed that even his sweat glands had lost their ability to function. He was, as near frightened to death as he had ever been, although still not as much as he was going to be. And to judge from his appearance, Captain Farmer was equally frightened.

The passengers had noted nothing strange, or almost nothing, and they took everything as calmly as if the ship had merely run into some trivial obstacle, like a tiny meteor. On each occasion there had been a slight jar, as if a minor set of the ship's rockets had suddenly come into operation. But the passengers had long since gotten over the novelty of space travel, and they hardly ever bothered to stare through the transparent metal ports

at the stars outside. Naturally, they had noticed no change in position.

It had happened the first time just a short distance beyond the Mars orbit. The ship's motors had been functioning smoothly and Dyson, almost lulled to sleep by the mild vibration that had managed to survive the shock absorbers, snapped awake as Captain Farmer entered the pilot's compartment.

"Everything in order, Dyson?"

"Everything in order, sir."

"She's vibrating a little more than usual, isn't she?"

Captain Farmer was a man of forty-five, with the normal friendliness of the master of a passenger ship. On this trip, however, he numbered among his passengers a man toward whom he found it difficult to maintain the usual friendly feelings. Dyson, who was only thirty, and lacked the discretion he

might be expected to acquire later, said, "You're right, sir, she is vibrating a little more than usual. I assumed that was due to the fact that our distinguished guest was blasting with all jets."

Captain Farmer's eyebrows went up. "Young man, I could have you broken for a piece of insolence like that."

Dyson flushed. "I'm sorry, sir—"

"Never mind being sorry. The trouble is, by Pluto, that you're right. Ex-Governor Flagstaff hasn't stopped blasting from the time he's come on board. He's been explaining to me how to navigate."

Dyson breathed a sigh of relief at learning that the old man hadn't really been annoyed by his remark. He said, "That must have been intensely interesting, sir."

"Interesting and nauseating. Do you realize that there isn't a single subject on which the old blowhard isn't ready to hold forth, at half a second's notice?"

"He has seen a lot, sir. And he's done a lot, too. Assistant deputy inspector general for Interplanetary Health, Administrator of Mercury's Twilight Zone, Air Commissioner of Mars, and finally, after many other things, Governor of Venus—"

"I know all that," growled Captain Farmer. "He has other good qualities as well. He's generous and loyal to his friends. Foolishly or otherwise, he refused to condemn Senator Horrigan when the latter made an ass of himself and almost every other politician cleared his skirts of the man. Flagstaff is probably good to his old mother, and to his wife and children if he has any. And I can't stand him, anyway."

"How do the passengers feel, sir?"

"They love him, God bless their innocent little hearts. They hang on to his every word. All, that is, except the honeymooners. They hang on to

each other."

"There's one consolation, sir," said Dyson soothingly. "We won't have to stand him much longer. We'll be landing soon on Ganymede, and from there on our ears will be our own."

"I can't wait," muttered Captain Farmer.

THAT WAS when the thing happened. One moment they were past the Mars orbit, heading for Jupiter and its satellites. The next moment they were a hundred million miles back, not too far from Earth.

Dyson stared at the stars outside, and at his instruments, and the sweat seemed to form on his forehead all at once, as if condensing out of the air. His throat, on the other hand, was completely dry. He closed his eyes and opened them again, to find the view unchanged. He started to talk, and managed to stammer, "S-sir..."

Both men stared at their positions on the automatic location chart which was still functioning. There could be no doubt where they were. But there was no indication of how they had got there.

The ship was blasting away as smoothly as ever. Once more they began to put Earth behind them and inch toward Mars in a perfectly normal, well regulated way.

Dyson said huskily, "Do you have any idea what happened, sir?"

"No. Do you?"

"I'm afraid not, sir. Except that we've lost a hundred million miles."

"It couldn't happen. We're having delusions."

"Of course, sir."

"Don't you agree with me, you fool. Just keep your mouth shut and attend to your job," said Captain Farmer fiercely. And he turned quickly and slammed the door behind him.

There was a little trouble with the

other two crew members, but practically none with the passengers, who were informed simply that the ship had slowed down and would be forced to delay its arrival. In view of the fact that there was plenty of food, water, and air, there was no cause for alarm. All the same, among all the passengers there was a general feeling of unease, which ex-Governor Flagstaff summed up neatly by saying, "Now, Captain Farmer, if you had taken my advice, this would never have happened."

Captain Farmer smiled politely, although his forehead was still covered with sweat. It is true that he had to grit his teeth to keep the smile from coming apart at the seams.

For the next three weeks, he was always wondering whether it would happen again. He had just about assured himself that it would not—they were fifty million miles past the position they had previously attained by the time he felt he could breathe safely—when there was the same slight shock, and they were back near Earth again.

THIS TIME he and Dyson were speechless for a good hour, and it seemed to Dyson that the extra motion of his heart during that period almost made up for the hundred and fifty million miles they had lost. Finally, when Captain Farmer had recovered control of his vocal chords, he asked, mildly enough, "Were you born on Earth or on Mars, Dyson?"

"On Mars, sir. Why?"

"On Earth you would have encountered a small insect known as the ant."

"I've seen pictures of them, sir, and read about their habits."

Captain Farmer went on, unheeding: "As children, we used to play little games with the creatures. One

of us would put an ant in the palm of his hand and watch it crawl frantically to the end of one finger in a mad rush to escape. When it reached the end of the finger, however, it would simply find itself transferred to the palm of the other hand. It was an interesting game, and with variations could be played for an hour at a time. Sometimes we'd transfer the ant to a blade of grass, or to a twig, or a piece of paper. The ant would be forever trying to escape and forever failing. We used to be greatly amused."

Dyson was white. He said, "You think, sir, that someone is playing a game with us?"

"Someone or something."

"Let's hope, sir, that he gets tired of it soon."

"Let's hope that he doesn't. Do you know what used to happen occasionally when we got tired of the ant, Dyson? After all, children, without realizing it, can be fairly cruel. It sometimes seemed the funniest thing of all to let the poor creature seem to attain safety—and then to step on it."

Dyson was silent. At last he said, "The other crew members are sure to suspect the truth, sir. They'll have to be told. And perhaps we'd better try to head back for Earth."

Captain Farmer shook his head. "We're bound for Ganyমেদে," he said. "To tell the truth, though, I don't see that it will make much difference one way or the other where we try to go. If we're in the hands of some joker who can play tricks like this just to amuse himself, we're pretty helpless."

"I don't know about that, sir." Dyson was still pale, but his face had a grim determined expression that under the circumstances must have seemed silly, and was yet strangely touching. "Men may be thousands of times as large and as strong as ants, and they may have all sorts of weap-

ons and a control which must seem to the ants like miraculous powers—but didn't the ants ever get angry and try to strike back, sir? Didn't they ever bite?"

"Sometimes," admitted Captain Farmer. "But they didn't get far with a human being who used reasonable care."

"Perhaps we'll be lucky, sir. Perhaps this joker won't be careful enough."

The trouble was, as Dyson realized later, that there was no way to be sure of whether a joker was playing with them or not. And they couldn't tell in the slightest how careful this possibly non-existent joker was being. All the same, when they approached the point in the orbit from which they had first been hurled back, Dyson, who was at the controls again, put on a sudden burst of speed and cut sharply to the side.

THE JOKER, if there was one, must have found the maneuver highly amusing. The next moment, the ship was spinning around rapidly, not only in the normal fashion along its major axis, but end over end as well.

By the time that Dyson managed to reach the controls and start the emergency jets blasting to straighten the ship out, the passengers knew at last that something unusual had happened. Alarms were ringing throughout the vessel, and there were frantic calls for Captain Farmer. Dyson stared at his position chart, turned as gray as a corpse, and staggered out toward the ship's main deck, flagrantly shirking his duty as pilot.

Captain Farmer was facing an angry and frightened group of passengers. All fifty of them had crowded on deck, and as if by unanimous consent had forced ex-Governor Flagstaff to the fore as their spokesman.

The old man, with his flowing white hair and pink, finely wrinkled face, was a dignified and impressive figure, well fitted to express the general concern.

"Captain Farmer," he said firmly, "I have reason to believe that you have been guilty of a grave and reprehensible dereliction of duty."

Captain Farmer smiled sardonically and said nothing. As a matter of fact, he found it difficult to talk.

"Never in my many years of space travel have I experienced so flagrant a breach of flight discipline as has just taken place. It denotes, Captain, the most appalling incompetence, an incompetence of which you have, moreover, given ample testimony throughout the voyage. By refusing from the outset to accept the advice which I have tendered—advice which is the fruit of many years of experience—you have, in essence, invited the onset of trouble. You are considerably behind schedule."

"Considerably," agreed Captain Farmer, still smiling without amusement.

"You appear to have lost control of your crew. I note that all are now present in this room, and that the ship is apparently in uncontrolled flight."

"The ship is under excellent control," said Captain Farmer.

"I wonder, sir, exactly how competent you are. I demand to know the ship's position."

"You'd like to know that, would you?"

"I certainly should."

"So should I. Perhaps Mr. Dyson can tell us."

They all stared at Dyson. He swallowed, and stammered, "I have no idea, sir, except that we're out of the System."

"Impossible, young man." The old ex-Governor's eyes flashed. "We had

been informed that we were delayed. Therefore, it is obvious that we have been traveling far below our maximum speed. But even at maximum cruising speed—"

Captain Farmer interrupted: "You have no idea, Mr. Dyson, exactly where we are?"

"No, sir. The stars are completely unfamiliar. There is no point of reference, no skymark. For all we can tell, we may be in a different galaxy."

IT WAS at this point that pandemonium may be said to have broken out. Somebody yelled, somebody else yelled louder in order to be heard, and then everybody was yelling. A man rushed for the exit, and within two seconds almost everyone else was rushing for the exit, too, to be rushing back two seconds later, as if surprised to discover that no exit could possibly lead straight back to the System.

At that moment, Dyson rather admired the old man. He might be a pompous ass, but he was not a purebred ass; he had in addition the qualities of a man. He kept saying proudly, "Gentlemen! Ladies! Gentlemen! Take your seats, please! I have not adjourned the meeting!" And after a time, despite the fact that no one paid any attention to him, everyone did calm down. There was nothing else to do.

When he had everyone's attention once more, he addressed Dyson and Captain Farmer again: "Have you any idea, gentlemen, how you have managed to get us into so unfortunate and disastrous a situation?"

The Captain said, with an appearance of respect he did not feel, "I can only guess. But you are wrong, Governor, in assuming that I and the crew are in any way to blame." He explained briefly how they had twice passed the Mars orbit, only to be

swept back.

"Then we are entirely at the mercy of superior forces, to which we are being subjected for reasons unknown?" the old man reasoned.

"I think, Governor, that your statement covers the facts very nicely."

"And presumably there is some superior race of beings, or perhaps some single being which, shall we say, is toying with us?"

"That doesn't necessarily follow," said Captain Farmer. "There may be entirely natural causes of an impersonal nature which have come into play."

"That is highly improbable. No, Captain, we are being made sport of." His eyes flashed. "We are being made the subject of a jest, I say. And I shall not tolerate it."

Dyson stared at him, at least partially in admiration. The old windbag was revealing unexpected qualities of shrewdness and courage. Dyson said, and there was all the respect of a dozen worlds in his manner, "What do you intend to do, Governor?"

The ordinary reprisal against insult would have been to write a letter to the *Tellurian Times*. Unfortunately, this course of action was not now open. But ex-Governor Flagstaff did not lose his pride nor his fierceness of manner. He said, "I shall ponder my next step, young man. But be assured of one thing. Whatever I may decide to do, I shall not tolerate personal indignity."

THERE was general applause, and on this happy note the impromptu meeting broke up. Later, meals were served as usual, and life on the ship reverted to what might have been called normal. But in the pilot's cabin, Dyson sat and stared vacantly before him. A ship that was rapidly heading

for nowhere hardly needed a very attentive pilot.

He looked up as Captain Farmer entered and dropped wearily into a seat. The motion was little more than a gesture to indicate the Captain's feeling. Gravity was so low here that standing took little effort. But at the moment, even that little seemed to be beyond the Captain's strength.

"Well, Dyson, what are we going to do?"

"I don't know, sir. Perhaps Governor Flagstaff will actually think of something."

"What in Pluto can he think of? Can an ant think of something to do when I have him on my finger?"

"No, sir," said Dyson slowly. "But the analogy isn't perfect. We're not ants. We're men."

"To our joker friend, we're ants."

"That may be. By the way, sir, it struck me as interesting that Governor Flagstaff should have had the same idea of being toyed with that you did."

"It's the natural thing to suppose."

"I shouldn't say that, sir. Ordinarily I'd have imagined that we had run into strange forces of a novel nature. Do you suppose, sir, that our joker friend has deliberately planted the idea of his existence in our minds?"

"Why the devil would he do that?"

"Just to make the whole thing funnier, from his point of view. Just to make sure that we run about as frantically as possible."

Captain Farmer shook his head dubiously. "We can't be any more frantic than we are now. We're entirely at his mercy."

"That's what I mean, sir. An ant might be frantic enough if it kept trying to get home and always found itself shifted to some other spot just when it was about to arrive there. But you can imagine what panic it would

feel if it could realize that its fate depended entirely on some superior creature."

Captain Farmer stood up. "There's nothing we can do," he said flatly. "Unless you consider that waiting to see what will happen is doing something. We shall maintain the normal ship's routine. When you're relieved, you will try to get some sleep."

"Yes, sir," said Dyson politely, maintaining the normal routine.

The other crew members and the passengers went along with Captain Farmer's orders very nicely. Ex-Governor Flagstaff pondered deeply, consulting without end with various non-confidential informants, and throughout the rest of the ship the usual games of cards and checkerboard dominoes began again. At the next meal there were even two complaints about the automatic cooking, which in all the years of the ship's existence had never once been known to deviate from standard performance.

AND DYSON kept on wondering when the joker would get tired of watching his ant, and crush it between a casual thumb and forefinger so quickly that the ant wouldn't realize what was happening.

When he awoke from his nap, he sought Captain Farmer again. "Sir, I have some information about our friend."

"You have? How did you get it?"

"You might say, sir, that I dreamed it. I was, of course, meant to dream it, just as you were meant to suspect his existence. I think he's having a great deal of fun watching our struggles and wants us to think that we might even get away. Naturally, we won't be allowed to escape. To change the simile, it's like a cat playing with a mouse."

"And what have you learned about

this particular cat?" asked Captain Farmer grimly.

"He, or more properly, It, is very much larger than we are. He—I'll continue to use the pronoun if you don't mind, sir, because it makes him seem more personal—he covers a great deal of space. I couldn't tell exactly how much."

"Our joker friend wasn't too specific?"

"He was very vague about it. I think, sir, that it's a good sign. If he doesn't want us to know too much about him, he may be vulnerable in some way that we don't suspect."

"And can't possibly learn."

"To change the simile back again, sir, an ant tries to bite with what weapons it has. We have weapons, too."

"Where do we aim them?"

"Anywhere. Perhaps we're resting on him right now, as an ant might be resting on your finger. We aim in all directions, and we're sure to hit something."

"How much harm do you think we can do that way?"

"Very little, sir," confessed Dyson.

"And of course there's always the consideration that whatever we intend to do, he's sure to know about in advance."

"Yes, I realize that he's watching us right now."

"Perhaps he's doing more than that, sir. If he can suggest things to your mind, and make me think of things in my sleep, he may be able to read our minds at will."

"So anything we try to do against him will have to be done with his full knowledge?"

"I'm afraid so, sir."

They stared at each other in silence. Captain Farmer said, "It's hopeless. Perfectly hopeless."

"Nothing is ever perfect, sir, even

lack of hope. We have to keep on trying. He gave me the impression that he'd be very much disappointed if we stopped trying. He might finish us off then and there. You can't have very much fun with an ant that remains motionless on your finger, and a cat can't enjoy itself with a mouse that doesn't try to run away."

"You mean that he might crush us and find himself a more belligerent ant or mouse?"

"Naturally, sir."

CAPTAIN FARMER swore. He said, "To hell with him. I'm quitting right now. Let him finish us if he wants to, but I'll be forever damned if I contribute to his fun."

"You're forgetting, sir, that we have an obligation to the passengers. However, let us forget that temporarily, if you wish, and let me go on with what I have learned. He belongs to a huge race of a kind whose existence we can't more than suspect. I don't know if they extend through more than three dimensions or not. But his ability to transport us so rapidly suggests that he does. Ordinarily, one of his kind would be no more interested in our ship than a human being in half a dozen individual ants. It seems, however, that he is rather unique in having a sense of humor."

"Psychopathic, I'd call it."

"Having a sense of humor and being psychopathic may have more in common than is usually supposed, sir. At any rate, he is not considered abnormal by his kind, although the rest of them are engaged in very serious and weighty tasks. In fact, a certain friend of his has our Solar System as part of his territory, and is keeping an eye on it to see how things come out. That is one of the reasons our joker friend has interfered with us.

He wants unexpected happenings in the System to puzzle and annoy his friend."

"Like a laboratory worker switching labels on a friend's white rats to confuse him."

"Something like that, sir. At any rate, I have the impression that we're not the first mouse, or white rat, or ant, if you prefer, that he's played with."

Captain Farmer looked sick. "You mean that he's lifted other ships?"

"Yes, sir. He's probably the cause of at least half a dozen of those unexplained disappearances during the past few years."

"And he killed the people in them when he got tired of playing with them?"

"I think so, sir. But that's not the main danger."

Captain Farmer put a hand to his forehead. He said, "Some of the kids, when they got tired of playing with individual ants, used to think it fun to smash an entire anthill."

Dyson nodded slowly. "He hinted at that. It would be a wonderful joke for him to smash a planet, or even the entire System. His friend wouldn't have any idea what had happened. Like the white rats in a laboratory all dying suddenly, when they should have been alive and healthy." Dyson seemed to choke up slightly. "I know how you feel, sir. I felt almost the same way. But I thought I was dreaming, and in a dream it seems somehow normal to be completely paralyzed with fear. I remember that I seemed to be standing apart from myself assuring myself that it couldn't happen. Then, when I awakened, I realized that it could, but I realized it gradually, in time to become accustomed to the idea."

"So it's no longer merely a question of saving our own lives. It's a ques-

tion of the entire human race."

Dyson nodded again.

CAPTAIN FARMER'S teeth gritted in controllable rage. "We may have weak fangs, but we can still strike," he spat out suddenly. And then, before Dyson could stop him, he reached for the automatic defense levers.

The guns swung into operation at once, blasting away fore and aft, shooting into space at all angles. The ship rocked and jolted under the shocks. From the passengers' quarters came cries of alarm.

Captain Farmer wiped his forehead. Dyson said quietly, "What now, sir?"

"Nothing. I can think of nothing to do. We probably didn't even scratch him." He added glumly, "I think that I'd better reassure the passengers. I'll tell them it was a false alarm."

When he had departed, Dyson sat staring thoughtfully out of a port. He wondered if the joker had been at all amused by the Captain's antics.

Later, when the ship was moving along quietly again, he said, "I have an idea, Captain Farmer."

"Are you sure that the joker isn't aware of it?"

"Not at all sure, sir. But I don't think it will matter, if I can discuss it first with Governor Flagstaff."

"What can that old windbag have to offer?"

"I no longer regard him as a windbag, sir. I consider him an elder statesman of the human race. And I feel that our lives and the lives of every one in the System depend on him."

Captain Farmer's lower jaw dropped. He looked too dazed to object when Dyson saluted and stepped out of the cabin.

The former Governor was still apparently pondering his course and delivering an oration as he pondered.

Dyson said soberly, "Governor, may I speak to you in private? It's on a matter of the utmost gravity."

"Certainly, young man. Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen."

The ex-Governor led Dyson to his cabin and opened his mouth to speak, but Dyson forestalled him. The young officer said bluntly, "Governor, the fate of the human race depends on you."

The old man's mouth snapped shut. He must often have had the very thought that Dyson had just expressed, but up to the present time no one else had ever said it out loud.

"This cosmic jester who believes that he has us in his power," went on Dyson, "plans to exterminate the entire human race. Only a man of your eminence, Governor, of your wisdom and experience, can have the power to restrain him. You are accustomed to dealing with affairs of great moment. You have never dealt with one of greater moment than this."

GOVERNOR FLAGSTAFF'S jaws clamped even tighter in an expression of determination. His eyes flashed atomic fires.

"I ask you, Governor, to plead—"

"Young man, you can stop right there. Governor Flagstaff to plead? No, my young friend, no!"

"To negotiate—"

"Sir, I do not plead, I do not negotiate. I know my rights. I shall demand!"

If the joker expected Governor Flagstaff's determination to be shaken by what happened then, he was badly mistaken. Suddenly, every one on the ship seemed to burst into flame. Each individual glowed, and each one with a different color flame. There was renewed panic at first, as the passengers imagined that they were being burnt alive. The panic subsided in

time as they found themselves unharmed, and died away altogether after two hours of dazzling brilliance, when the light began to dim slowly until each person was no more than mildly phosphorescent. And except for the fright the untimely jest had caused, there seemed to be no ill effects. But the unexpected touch of infantile humor terrified almost everyone on board.

It did not terrify Governor Flagstaff. He was glowing a faint green as he mounted the rostrum and faced the shining and frightened assemblage that had gathered in the main dining room and now waited to hear his words. But there was the spirit of confidence in each word he uttered, and in his manner of uttering it.

It was generally agreed later that the speech was a masterpiece. Dyson, who was himself fairly immune to oratory, noted that the passengers were soon listening as if to a work of art, instead of to a hopeless demand that they be allowed to remain alive. They had not been informed that the fate of the human race depended on Governor Flagstaff, or they might not have listened so calmly. As it was, only Dyson, Captain Farmer, and the old orator himself were aware of the desperate nature of the situation.

There was a bit of uncertainty as to how best to address the unseen listener. Governor Flagstaff solved the problem neatly and ironically. "My Worthy Friend," he began, in tones of stinging rebuke, and was immediately interrupted by applause. The audience knew at once that this was to be a fighting speech.

"My Worthy Friend," repeated Governor Flagstaff. "I who address you am a comparatively unworthy servant of the peoples of my fair System. From the blazing molten deserts of Mercury to the icy oxygen-

frozen wastes of Pluto, I have done my feeble best to serve, and I flatter myself that I have attained some small measure of success in my efforts. I am pleased to think that I have aided, to some small degree, the countless billions of industrious and thrifty individuals who constitute our race. I have done this without thought of profit or reward, and I have been deeply touched at the gratitude of my fellow men. It would be immodest in the extreme to mention the honors with which they have recognized my services."

THERE WAS a slight clearing of the throat. "I shall cite only the Medal of Interplanetary First Citizen, awarded for my services to the great and growing industries of Mars, the Plaque for Distinguished Health Service, the Sun Disc of Mercury, and the Watery Globe of the First Rank of Venus. Let me repeat, I should deem it highly immodest to say more.

"My Worthy Friend, at this moment which I regard as the climax of my career, my mind travels back in time through many years and many miles to the planet of my birth—to that fairest of all planets of that fairest of all Systems—to Earth and its teeming wonders. Ah, how pleasant it is to think of my native land—of its smiling groves, its laughing streams with their finny denizens leaping and playing in the sparkling sunshine—how gratifying to recall its fields of rippling grain, to picture in the mind's eye once more its magnificent cities with their heaven-piercing spires..."

Dyson listened in awe as Governor Flagstaff gave a brief recapitulation of the story of his childhood, his youth, his years of service in one exalted position after another. Eventually, taking his audience along with him, he worked his way up to the

present moment again.

"My Worthy Friend, I speak to you now not as a lone and feeble individual who pits his insignificant strength against your might, but as a representative of that master race of all creation—Man! I speak to you as a representative of that race which began its conquest of space and time but a moment ago, as the Great Clock of Nature reckons time, and has already tamed the planets of an entire system. I speak as a representative of those who have set before their eyes the goal of mastering stars and galaxies, those who, in but another moment—yea, in but an infinitesimal moment of age-long history—shall attain their goals. I warn you, My Worthy Friend, I warn you—"

It was at this exalted point that Governor Flagstaff's lofty speech terminated abruptly. The audience rubbed its hundred odd eyes; but no rubbing could change the fact that a second before the Governor had been present before them, and now he was gone.

A roar of anger swelled from more than fifty throats, and at that moment the ship trembled. Like a live creature writhing in unheard of agony, it stretched and twisted as if made of elastic polymer. At one place the sides yawned apart to triple their normal width, at another they caved in until they almost touched. The roar of anger became a wail of despair as the ship seemed to tie itself into a knot and then spring straight again, hurling its passengers about in all directions.

Through the sound of moaning, Dyson managed to clear his thoughts. Badly bruised himself, but apparently with no bones broken, he crawled slowly forward until he succeeded in reaching the ship's cabin. He found Captain Farmer there before him.

The ship was racing along at breath-taking speed, but quietly, without acceleration. Through the front port, Dyson could see a yellow star that shone with almost the brightness of Venus as seen from Earth.

HE TURNED to stare at their chart, but Captain Farmer was ahead of him here too. The Captain said huskily, "It's the Sun. We're back in our own System."

"Beyond the Uranus orbit," whispered Dyson. "He had to have his last bit of fun with us."

"At least he didn't destroy the ship. Come along, Dyson, I want to see in what condition he left us."

The ship, they soon learned, was little harmed. The walls gave no sign of being damaged by their strange behavior under strange stresses, and only a few instruments had been smashed. Of the passengers, fully half had suffered from minor bruises, but only two were seriously harmed.

Governor Flagstaff had not been returned. The passengers, no longer gleaming with a brilliance not their own, were beginning to discuss holding a memorial service for him. Dyson and Captain Farmer returned to the pilot's cabin.

"And I called him a windbag," said Captain Farmer, his face wracked with self-contempt. "By Pluto, there was a man, a man who wasn't afraid. He saved us all."

"Yes, sir," agreed Dyson automatically.

"He knew that he'd be risking his life. And he knew that death might not have been the worst fate to befall him. Perhaps even now he's suffering the tortures of the damned."

"No, sir, he is not." Dyson looked his superior in the eye. "Just before the Governor disappeared, sir, the joker contacted me. And I realized

that my plan had succeeded."

"Your plan? Wasn't it to have Governor Flagstaff challenge him?"

"Of course, sir. But the effect of the challenge, as I looked at it, was not quite the same as most people appear to think. What would be your reaction, sir, if this ant that had been running frantically up and down your finger were suddenly to stop and make a speech telling you of his glorious career, and of the respect in which he was held by his fellow ants? What would be your reaction if this ridiculous ant were to boast of the wonderful things his fellow ants could do and warn you to leave them alone? Do you think, sir, that you'd be very angry?"

Captain Farmer said unwillingly, "I suppose that it would seem absurd."

"It seemed much more than that to Our Worthy Friend, as Governor Flagstaff thought of him. Remember that he has an abnormally developed sense of humor. I could feel mental echoes of his laughter. And I knew what he meant to do. It was exactly as I had hoped."

"You thought it would be funny?"

"Funny and tragic. But the joker wouldn't see the tragic side of it. He appreciated only the humor. That's why he took the Governor to stay with him. I'd have let him take me, sir—it wasn't that I shirked danger. But neither I nor any one else could have made the speech the Governor made without half trying."

"And then, when he's tired of the Governor—"

HE WON'T tire fast, sir. He wants to show his new acquisition off to his own kind. As a sort of private clown, or jester. He thinks that all his kind will find the Governor funny. Perhaps they will. But of course the Governor won't know it. He'll think

he's speaking to an audience of ordinary people; the joker can easily create phantom humans. Every oration of his will be greatly applauded. The Governor will be very happy. The happier he is, the funnier he'll be to the joker."

"For the few years he'll be allowed to live."

"Oh, no, sir, he'll be kept alive for hundreds of years. He'll outlive us all."

"And how about the rest of us?"

"I'm under the impression, sir, that once the joker really listened to Governor Flagstaff, he lost interest in the rest of our System. I don't think we'll be bothered again, at least for a long time."

There was a look of pain on Captain Farmer's face. He sat there for a time brooding, and finally he spat out, "I don't like it. I don't like to be laughed at myself, and I don't like the idea of Governor Flagstaff's being laughed at in that way. If it hadn't been a question of the entire human race, but only of a single ship, I'd have told Our Worthy Friend to go ahead and do his worst and be damned to it. Let him destroy us if he pleases, but let him not sneer at us."

Dyson said soberly, "I don't like to be laughed at either, sir. Perhaps even ants don't like it. But we won't be laughed at forever." He paused, and then went on as if to himself: "You've read those stories, sir, of ants who got together and conquered the world. And you've heard that proverb about the one who laughs last."

"The stories have remained stories,"

retorted Captain Farmer grimly. "They've never come true."

"Because the ants have been ants for hundreds of millions of years, and are going to remain ants. But men were once mere apes—a moment ago by Nature's and Governor Flagstaff's reckoning—and in another moment they will be more than men. He was right, Captain, even though the joker laughed at him. In but another moment of cosmic time we shall have mastered the forces of stars and galaxies. And when that time comes, the joker with all his powers won't be inclined to laugh at us."

"We have to reach Ganymede," said Captain Farmer abruptly.

"Yes, sir."

"We'll have to report Governor Flagstaff missing. I can see the time I'll have trying to explain what happened to him. But I'm sure of one thing: I'm sorry I ever called him a windbag."

"There was power behind his wind, sir. Shall I start to decelerate?"

"How fast are we going?"

"Almost half light-speed, sir."

Captain Farmer whistled. "No ship that I heard of ever did a fifth of that before. Decelerate by all means. And gently."

"Very gently, sir. But it won't be long before we're crowding light-speed itself. A mere fraction of a moment of cosmic time. And then, a little longer, sir—and it may be our turn to laugh."

They didn't, however, laugh much during the rest of the trip, although they reached Ganymede without further incident.

THE END



THERE WAS a time—pre-atomic world 1945—when the grim phrase “No Man’s Land” meant something entirely different from what it does now. It referred to the space between two combatant armies, an area so dangerous “no man” was expected to enter it. The phrase as it is now used has a much more terrifying connotation. Oddly enough, the new definition was proposed in an effort to settle the “little war” in Korea.

A Congressman has suggested that the only possible means of placing a barrier between the North and South Korean areas to prevent the continual see-sawing of armies back and forth across the country, is the setting up of a quarantine line, a belt or strip of radioactive land! The Congressman has proposed that a strip of land thirty or forty miles wide be sown with radioactive dust! Absolute isolation would be achieved: no living thing would dare

cross such a belt.

The death-area could be carefully selected, a warning given, and then a selected radioactive dust could be sown from low-flying aircraft. Depending upon the type of radioactive dust selected, the area could be made unlivable for any given length of time, ranging from days or weeks or months to years and even decades.

The major drawback to such a proposal, of course, is that it brands the United States as the “opener” in the use of atomic weapons and might provoke an all-out atomic war.

As remarkable as the suggestion itself is the fact that we are talking now in practicable terms of procedures which a few short years ago would have been called the rankest fiction, the most fantastic imaginative delirium. Now they’re cold, hard reality, whose ultimate effects we can only suspect!

THE EYE OF THE SPY

By Wilton Avery MacDonald

IN ORWELL’S FAMOUS “1984,” one of the most insidious weapons used by the State for continually prying on the personal lives of each regimented slave-citizen, is a small two-way television set built into every home. Cheap and simple, it makes each human being a cog in the vast impersonal giant that is the government. There is no escape, no privacy. TV is all-seeing.

Certainly it is to be hoped—expected, rather—that that day will never come, when men are enslaved in that sense to a TV tube, but one thing is certainly sure, the possibility—from a technical standpoint—will soon exist. Just as technicians invented the devilish wire-tapping device which enables spies to tap any telephone conversation, so too will the television tube, the iconoscope and orthicon he developed which will enable these “spy-tubes” to be inserted anywhere!

So far, electronics hasn’t advanced to the stage where it can make miniature TV receiving and transmitting tubes. The projection tubes for receiving, however, are getting smaller and no less eminent an authority than the TV expert, Farns-

worth himself, thinks that tubes no bigger than a cigar will soon be in the cards, doing away with the huge ones we now have. As for the scanning tubes, they are already small and getting smaller, developing slowly the sensitivity and size of the human eye!

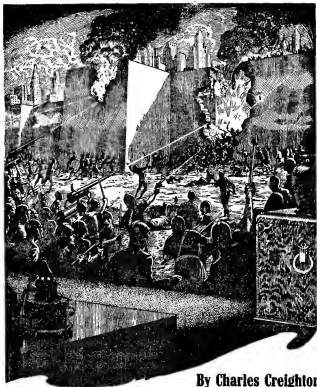
This means wonderful advances, of course, in the future of commercial TV, and in industry such tubes will work miracles, being capable of replacing human eyes in man situations. But the ominous suggestions of “1984” remain with us. You can’t help but shudder to think how a police state might make use of such a powerful, ever-watchful spy, capable of never relaxing its observation for one instant. What is worse, of course, is that the victims never need know he’s being watched. So small will the spy-tubes be built that they may be concealed in almost anything. Naturally there are humorous aspects (and not so humorous ones) to this development, but they are far outweighed by the evil potentialities. Undoubtedly legislation will soon have to be created to cope with the possibilities, even as now legislation forbids (theoretically) the use of wire-tapping gadgets.

NEVER SHOOT A STRANGER

If Cathy pulled that trigger, the man she loved would die. And so would an entire civilization on another world!



"It's your decision to make," Remat told the king. "Only you can stop the slaughter."



By Charles Creighton

SHE OPENED her purse, held it up to the faint light from the distant park light and began to dig into it.

He reached for the kerchief in his breast pocket. "I have a handkerchief if that's what you're looking for, Cathy."

Her eyes remained on what she was doing. "No, Bill. Here it is. . . ." Her

hand came out; it was clamped firmly and capably around the butt of a pistol. She took two backward steps, placing herself beyond reach of any sudden move, the muzzle of the gun held in an unwavering line.

He said, "Why?" The shock of her completely unexpected action made the word little more than a whisper.

"It's got to be, Bill."

She was going to shoot. He became aware of the darkness, the lateness of the hour, the absence of people. The reason for her choosing this path was now clear. She had called it their lover's walk the night before. Tonight it was going to be his death walk....

Her eyes were steady on his. Her face was immobile, the clean lines of it firm and smooth against the bone structure, the face he knew and loved so well. His eyes fell again to the gun, saw the tightening finger, and the torpor which had seized his brain dissolved. He took a single step toward her, one hand outstretched in a hopeless gesture....

THE FIGURE leaped on the girl, upsetting her and knocking the pistol from her fingers. Swiftly the man bent and retrieved the gun. But in that second the girl took flight, running headlong and wildly into the darkness.

Bill Hadley made to pass the stranger but was stopped and held firm by the man's grip on his arms. "You'd be running a fool's race in the darkness. Lord! What's this city coming to? Women committing holdups. Lucky I happened to be passing."

Hadley shivered. The stranger felt the involuntary movement. "Here, here! You've had a nasty shock, man! I think a drink is in order."

The soft embracing lights, the hearty masculine voices, the feminine perfumed odors and bodies pressing on all sides, held a reassuring comfort for Hadley. He looked at the bourbon and Seven-Up before him and downed it in a single gulp. The stranger sipped reflectively at his Scotch-and-water.

"You saved my life," Hadley said.

The stranger's shoulders heaved slightly. "I was passing, caught a glimpse of her, and jumped without thinking. And I'm actually scared silly of guns."

Hadley waved a finger at the bartender, turned and looked at the other's glass questioningly. "A refill, Mr.—?"

"Galbraith. Wyman Galbraith. Not just yet, thanks."

A nice guy, this Galbraith, Bill Hadley thought. He summed up the other's features, came to a more substantial conclusion. The kind of man you could trust. Steadfast dark eyes, clean wide brow, cobweb pattern of creases at the corners of the eyes showed the sign of thought or laughter or both. The kind of man you could trust....

Galbraith said: "A sign of the times, my friend. Insecurity breeds corruption of morals. You read more and more of women committing crimes of violence. I've often wondered what can be done."

"She wasn't that kind of woman, Galbraith. We were engaged. I should say, are engaged. It wasn't a stick-up."

Galbraith caressed his cheek. "Oh! A lover's quarrel. I don't mean to pry, but perhaps..." He let the words trail off. A pool into which the other could drop confidences if he wished.

A lover's quarrel, Hadley thought. The sound which came from his throat had the harshness of despair. No, they had never quarreled. Not the kind which could lead to gun-play, certainly. No. Cathy Moore was not the kind of woman who stored up hatreds until, like a cancerous sore, they ate through the flesh and came into the open. Then why had she brought a gun with her; why had she wanted to kill him? He had no doubt that her intent and purpose was murder.

"No, Mr. Galbraith. No lover's quarrel." He dropped his head into his hands. "I can't understand it, can't... Why, Cathy?"

GALBRAITH gave his attention to the amber-colored liquid in the glass before him, swirled it, said: "Could be any one of a number of reasons. Or all of them in final summation. Jealousy. A fancied wrong. You say you were engaged. I assume then that you have known this woman for a fairly long time?"

"A month."

The other's brows lifted, hands became still against the glass. "A month, and engaged. An affair of the heart."

Of the heart, Hadley repeated to himself. Was it? How much of Cathy Moore did he really know? How much did a man have to know? Until a few minutes ago, he had never known a questioning thought about her. It wasn't enough, then, to trust emotions. She certainly evoked them. More than any woman he had ever known. How often had his mind gone blank at her nearness, at the sight of her heart-shaped face with its grey-green eyes; the soft mouth, the breasts firm and sweet to the touch. He breathed heavily in remembrance....

"...I'm not going to lecture. You have the sound and look of intelligence. This I will say, however: the woman is a psychotic, emotionally unstable, a schizophrenic. She may have no remembrance of her act tonight, or will say she has none. But sooner or later she will reach the emotional state again where the same reasons for killing you will be uppermost in her mind. And even if you somehow circumvent her, she will a'ways hold the desire until it becomes all of the reason for existence, your murder."

"What would you have me do?" Hadley asked.

"Forget her," the words were as final as the act would be.

Hadley's head went up sharply at the words. Forget her! This man was asking the impossible. He didn't want

the other to see his face and turned to peer narrowly into the smoke haze over the bar. Who was this character? How had he come to be on the scene at just that opportune moment? Well, what the hell difference did it make? Galbraith had saved his life. He turned and looked at the other, and there was agony in his eyes.

"It isn't a matter of forgetting," Hadley said. "If she's sick, maybe I can help her. There are psychiatrists who could help her. Maybe she has a background of mental history of which I know nothing. No! I've got to help her."

Galbraith's shoulders made that slight heaving motion again. "Well—I suppose it would be asking the impossible, Mr. . . ."

"Damn!" Hadley grinned, and his rugged features dissolved into a very likable boyishness. "All this time and I haven't introduced myself. William Hadley. Bill is the tag people hang on me."

Galbraith nodded jerkily, and continued: "But don't rush things. Let a week go by before seeing her. If you try to see her soon you will be risking your life. Let her establish a bond with reality again before talking to her. Ash! I should never be allowed to get started on these things. I never know when to stop. Well, good night, Bill. I hope the next time we meet, it will be under pleasanter circumstances."

"Good night, Galbraith. It was certainly a pleasure meeting you as I did. Be seeing you. . ."

SLEEP WOULDN'T come. The darkness was a well in which he saw no end, no beginning. He lit his fifth cigarette and in turning to put the pack on his bedstand, caught sight of the clock. Its luminescent dial said one-thirty. He slid out of bed, found his robe and slippers and donned them and stepped to the window. Here and

there someone moved along the wide walks and every now and then cars swished by, though he was too far off to hear the sound of their tires. The sound of a ship's siren came to his ears and shortly the bridge began to rise, cutting off his view of Michigan Avenue south of the Wrigley Building.

He moved away from the window and over to his desk. There was a fifth of bourbon in one of the drawers. He poured an inch of it into a water glass and rolled the glass around in his hands.

If only she hadn't said what she did: "It's got to be, Bill." Premeditated murder. Nothing else! What other meaning could he give the words? Never mind what Galbraith said. It had nothing to do with her past. Only the past that was Bill Hadley's and hers. There was no regret in her voice, no sorrow, no hysteria; just a calm statement of fact. She had to kill him. But why?

He looked down at his hand. It was on the telephone—

The shrill, entirely unexpected jangle of the phone made him withdraw his hand as if the phone were a venomous snake. Once more it rang and his hand jerked again. He lifted it, said nothing, waited only for the voice to come to him.

"Bill!"

It was Cathy. He let silence drip into the phone; she could interpret it any way she liked.

"Honey—is that you?"

"Yes, Cathy." Just enough tone to lead her on. No warmth, but no anger.

"Bill, I'm frightened. Terribly! What happened tonight?"

"You know what happened tonight. What are you trying to pull? Amnesia? It's no good, Cathy. There can't be any excuses. *You tried to kill me.*"

Again the silence. This time he could hear her labored breathing over the phone. He could almost picture her, eyes wide, mouth slightly open, the fear in her eyes.

Her voice was dead, empty: "We can't talk this out over the phone. I've got to see you again. You've got to let me see you."

He wondered at his lack of emotion. "Where?" It was a guarded word, a suspicious word.

"Our lover's walk."

He smiled at the words. Did she think him a complete idiot? Lover's walk. This time she would make sure there would be no Galbraith around. "Cathy..." His voice mocked her. "Not there, surely."

"Anywhere you say, Bill. Only let me see you again."

He thought quickly, came to a decision. "Ricci's, Cathy."

"Lunch?"

"No. I've a busy schedule tomorrow. Harley Keith said he'd call around noon. Better make it dinner. Seven. Okay?"

"Of course. Good night..." pause, "Darling."

His throat ached to answer her. The love he felt came up to choke the indifference he pretended. "Night, Cathy...."

ROBERTO RICCI sat at his favorite spot, the curve of the circular bar closest the door. At his elbow the inevitable bowl of Martini onions, in his hand the Florentine wine glass, brimful of Strega. The pointed golden-brown beard and tufted eyebrows were drooping in self-imposed melancholia. One brow lifted at Bill Hadley's entrance.

"My friend," Ricci greeted him in his rich Tuscan tenor. "It is good seeing you again. A drink?"

"No, thanks, Ric. I'm a little late."

"Miss Moore?"

Hadley smiled.

"She is at your favorite table. I had the waiter place a rose before her. It did not erase the troubled look on her face, the pensive note in her eye. I was reminded of my recent wife, Maria. She looked like that the night she told me she was suing for divorce." He sighed, popped an onion in his mouth and drowned it with a swallow of the Strega. "A remarkable woman, Maria. Do you know she has a million dollars in her own right? She called a while ago to tell me she is asking the judge to increase the alimony payment to a thousand dollars a month." The slender pointed shoulders moved upward. "I suppose I will have to increase the prices again...."

Hadley made to move away, but stopped when Ricci took hold of his lapel.

"A lover's quarrel, Bill?"

"Nothing like it, Ric."

"A pity. For such a rose I would walk through a bed of thorns barefoot. Ah, well. Try the Scallopini, Bill. Excellent."

"I will, Ric. See you later."

Ricci popped an onion in his mouth, drowned it in a swallow of Strega and waited for the next customer....

"**H**ELLO, BILL." Her voice was a whisper. She gave him a quick glance from under curving lashes, then looked down at the glass of wine before her.

"Hello, Cathy. Sorry I'm late. Keith wanted me to get on the Indianapolis deal right away, so I spent a whole afternoon on the phone."

She didn't want to hear about it. "Bill, about last night—I've got to get straight on it."

He had thought it out, planned exactly what he was going to say, how he was going to act, even given him-

self a new set of values. Now that he was here, sitting at her side, smelling the subtle odor of her perfume, feeling the compelling wonder of her being, old kinships returned, old desires, memories.

He had been here only three days when Jack MacGovern of WBBM had thrown a party and had invited him. The usual gang of radio people had been there, the sharps and flats, the wise and drab, the sober and drunk.

She had been sitting in a corner, alone, a glass of Scotch-and-water in her hand, in her eyes a vague wonder, a look of astonishment at finding herself with these people. He had walked over and sat down, taken the glass from her hand, said, "You look like you were holding the A-bomb and didn't quite know what to do with it."

She had smiled ruefully. "Not quite that. But fairly close. Just that there are so many people here. I was told there would be a small party of us." Her eyes moved amusedly about at the eighty guests.

He put the glass of whiskey and water on the floor at his feet, turned to her—and said: "You interest me. Or is that an opening you've heard before?"

She hadn't said anything, but her eyebrow quirked up in amusement.

"I'm sorry I said that. Sounded like I'm wolfing. And I'm not, really. Why do we sit here?"

She asked, "Can you think of another place?"

He thought of it immediately. Ricci's, that wonderful Italian restaurant where the walls were hung with modern art and Ricci himself to greet you, with his golden-brown beard and eyebrows and his penchant for having the waiter bring a rose to your table as an offering to the beauty of the woman of your choice. So they

had gone there. It was strange how little was said. When he took her home later, to the very nice hotel on the North side, it was as though the whole issue between them had been settled. The words of love came to both naturally and easily and without affectation.

STRANGE. He remembered the night so well, yet couldn't remember the color of her dress. . . .

"Aah! Ric's found someone new!"

She looked up, startled, turned to where his eyes were fastened on the far wall, saw the painting, a clashing cacophony of vivid color, and turned her smouldering glance to him.

"You weren't listening! Bill! That's a boorish trick."

He laid his hand on hers quickly. Her hand was trembling, and he saw that her breath was coming in long, slow gasps, as if she were on the verge of tears. "It wasn't a trick, Cathy. I was lost in thought, and when I came out of it my eyes fastened on that new painting Ric's hung up. Believe me, there is no one more concerned with getting all this straight than I."

She seemed appeased. She lifted the glass, drained it and put it aside.

"Another?"

"No." She looked up and he turned.

A white-jacketed waiter was standing at his side. The man cocked his head to one side, lifted a dark brow and waited for the order. He was new to Bill.

"Where's Tony?" Bill asked.

"Seck. I'm hees cousin."

"That's too bad. Well, Cathy. . . ?"

"I'm not hungry. Really. Maybe a salad and coffee."

"Sure. Got to feed the inner gal. I think I'll have the Scallopini, waiter. And coffee."

The waiter made out his order, shook his head as if satisfied, and

moved off.

"Now that's done, tell me, Cathy, why did you pull a gun on me last night?"

"Is that—what I did?"

He said nothing but continued to look at her from under level brows, his eyes intently sober.

"I don't know. I had no gun when I came home."

Did that mean she knew she had a gun when she met him earlier that evening? He decided not to interrupt her or to tell her what happened after she pulled the gun. It might give her an opening she wanted. She was a clever girl. Better let her do all the leading.

A FAINT shadow darkened her face, but only for an instant, as though she were annoyed by his provocative silences when she wanted him to talk.

Her voice was low, deliberately held to a level tone: "You don't believe me. I can see it. I carried a gun with me, led you to this quiet place in the park, drew it, and was going to kill you. Why?"

"I don't know. I assumed you might have that answer."

"The answer I have you may not believe." She paused, as if at a loss for words. "Now I think meeting you was a mistake. I shouldn't have called."

He lowered his eyes. Damn! She was puzzled yet. She had pulled a gun on him, and she was confused.

The first course of the dinner arrived and Bill deliberately gave it his whole attention. She picked at the salad, but it was obvious she was only waiting for him to finish. With the second cup of coffee for Bill, the waiter brought a plump-bottomed bottle of Chianti.

"I didn't order wine," Bill said.

The waiter looked up in surprise. He had the bottle below the edge of the table. He stopped using the corkscrew and looked from one to another.

"But you always do," Cathy said.

"Not tonight," he told her. "An account stopped by this afternoon and we went down to the Mart Lounge for an hour."

The waiter's right hand jerked the cork out, and for a few seconds his hands fumbled with the bottle. He smiled, brought the bottle to the table and started to pour. "Wine. She's-a good for the stomach."

"The man is right," a voice spoke from beyond Bill's shoulder.

Bill saw the smile on Cathy's face and turned his head. Roberto Ricci was behind him. Ricci took the bottle from the waiter's hand, filled Bill's glass and started to pour for Cathy. A strange look came into her eyes, lost itself as she lowered her lids quickly. But the involuntary movement of her hands could not be stopped. It was as though she were pushing the bottle away.

RICCI LOOKED startled at the gesture, looked down at the bottle and called harshly to the waiter. The man scurried over and waited while Ricci bent to whisper in Bill's ear, "A fool! Chianti. Colored vinegar! He is new. His father dips his bread in this stuff and thinks it's ambrosia...." He lifted his head, said: "Rinaldi. For these people, Amalfi. The '27. Tell the wine steward...."

Cathy was smiling. Bill got the sudden impression the smile was forced. He felt irritated with it. It was the kind of smile that said, why the devil don't you mind your own business? He toyed with the stem of the wine glass. Someone's hand reached toward it. He looked up.

"Don't drink it, Bill," Ricci said.

It was his hand that had reached for the glass.

The irritation he felt toward Cathy spread to Ricci. "Aah! What's the difference? Wine's wine. This is all right."

Ricci took his hand away and moved his shoulder in resignation. He turned to the girl again. "But not for you, my dear. Only the golden warmth of Amalfi could set aglow the inner beauty one sees in you. It is nice of Ric to say these things, eh?"

"Very," she said. "I wish Bill would say them sometimes."

The golden-brown beard seemed to curl. "Zat! I look at you and see Maria. It is not fair. I must find a blonde, otherwise I will forget her latest demand. A thousand dollars a month. Ho!"

He moved off and Cathy followed him with her eyes. She turned to see Bill lifting the wine glass to his lips. "Aren't you going to wait for me?"

He waited until the waiter brought the bottle of wine for her, filled her glass, then lifted his to touch hers. For some strange reason she had turned gay.

"To the end—of all quarrels, and misunderstandings," she said.

He smiled and drained the glass. "Ugh! Ric was right. This stuff tastes like vinegar mixed with alum. Phooie!"

She laughed. "You would be stubborn. Serves you right."

He put the glass down and looked at her. She was smiling. A crooked, satisfied smile. Now she was pleased. He had drunk the wine. All this fuss over the wine. Why couldn't Ric mind his own business? He didn't want wine. And now he was sorry he had been stubborn about it. He blinked his eyes. Cathy had two mouths, and both of them were smiling. She also had two heads, but why

was there a filament of cobwebs before her?

COBWEBS. A forest of them, gossamer fine, covered with a sticky stuff that mired his legs and made it hard to move. Darkness ahead. He had to reach it. Aah! He was getting there. Darkness. The fine tracery of cobwebs was breaking, ripping away from all sides. A pit, bottomless.... He fell forward and was sucked downward and outward. The cold of outer space...

The barber removed the towel, held the mirror to the King's face. Jethor stroked the now-smooth bold line of chin and the firm flesh of his cheeks. He dismissed the barber with a casual gesture. The man bowed out without lifting his head.

Jethor lifted his eyes to the teletalk. The narrow screen showed three men in discussion. They were in the wide marble-pillared hall immediately outside the King's chamber. Jethor flicked a switch and the voice of Ramat, the High Minister, came to him.

"...The King's smallest wish must be our command. He has called this his personal crusade. To rid Mars of Hedra. Can there be anything of greater importance?"

Jethor smiled at the words. His fingers caressed the magnificent jewel hanging pendant at his throat. Hidden fires caught the smallest light and refracted it in a myriad of sparks. Ramat the honest. Jethor had thought long on his choice of High Minister. He narrowed his eyes, peered long and hard at Ramat. Satisfied with what he saw, he flicked the teletalk off. As though it were a signal, the great double doors opened and Ramat walked slowly into the room and up to the low throne.

"Majesty," Ramat said, bowing low

before the King. I have come immediately to your summons."

The mask of iron-willed discipline that was the face of King Jethor became more human. The strain departed from the eyes somewhat and a small smile broke at the corners of the mouth. "My friend. You tarried a while in the hall." It was a friendly rebuke.

"They asked me of victories. I told them just causes can suffer no defeats."

"Well spoken, my friend. But I did not mean to spy. Come. Sit at my side. My fifth corps meets the enemy shortly. I have a new perceptor screen, the latest invention of my scientists. They have succeeded in bending space to an even greater degree than before. The planets close in on us. This war must end soon."

The room grew dark as Ramat made himself comfortable at the King's side. A tiny ball of light glowed on the ceiling, spread until the entire ceiling gleamed with it, pale, iridescent. The light mellowed, faded, showed patterns; the patterns contrasted in depth and tone, became figures, and suddenly the whole scene was clear. The sun seemed to fill the whole Western sky, a dull, golden ball, without too much heat or life. The vast desert of Mars, mocking life, mocking living, stretched its endless greyness before them. Flanking the desert scene gigantic basalt monoliths marched in endless procession to either side of the desert, to the dimly seen horizon. And coming up the desert, between the basalt giants, three columns of men marched, as if upward from the walls of the room.

"...The fifth corps," Jethor was saying in low tones.

Now they were speeding ahead of the army, moving swiftly on the rays of the beam of bent light. The desert

spread, widened. Quite suddenly another army appeared on the scene. This one faced the direction of the approaching fifth corps. The watchers were quick to note the position of the other army, a curved line like a sickle moon, the nearest point of it closest to where the fifth corps would emerge into the valley.

Ramat felt the movement of the King, heard the click of the switch, and the King's imperious command: "A trap! Bring up the mobile units!"

TOO LATE. Gigantic tanks, each mounting rows of integrator beams, swept to the fore, cut into the advancing columns, opened up with a vast concerted fire of pure energy. The scene became a maelstrom of confusion. Whole columns of men disappeared in puffs of smoke, integrated into energy by the rays which reversed the process of disintegration and made a single atom of the many which constituted the human frame and dissipated that atom into pure energy.

Abruptly the scene died and the light faded back to the ball from which it had spread. The soft glow of the chamber lights came on again. From a hidden speaker a voice spoke in disassociated monotone: "...The fourth and fifth phalanx of the fifth corps decimated to the last man. Half the eighth phalanx and sixteenth caught in the trap but pulled out in time...."

Little bunches of muscles stood out on Jethor's jaw. The right eyelid twitched and the mouth was drawn in a snarl. "Blast her! The she-devil! How tired I am of this stalemate. But I am determined to win. It is my destiny. I will fight her with the last man on Mars, and maybe soon with more men than she dreamed existed. Eh, Ramat?"

"The machine is ready, Majesty?"

"Shortly. Shortly. Go, Ramat. Prepare the statements, assuage the people's sorrow. Remember the cause in which all lives are dedicated."

"The just cause, the King's cause. How can I forget?" Ramat bowed low, turned and stepped from the room.

Jethor moved to the enclosure of an alcove, drew a curtain behind him and flicked a tiny switch on the face of the column before which he stood. There was a clicking sound and the rounded face of the column spread to show the smooth glass face of a super-teletalk. The usual translucence faded into picture brightness and a face appeared on the screen. Hedra, Queen of Nether Mars, arch enemy of Jethor.

Hedra turned and walked away from the screen toward a table. She stood in profile, looking down at a framed picture. She was dressed in the classic tunic that revealed almost as much as it concealed of her beautiful body. Her hair was ebony, held in place by a band of precious metal, her brow wide and imperious. But her mouth was a thin slitted thing and her eyes, when she lifted the picture to her face, were narrowed ellipses of hatred.

"...The sands of Mars will be black with the millions of released atoms that will be your armies," her voice trembled, so great was her anger. "And some day I shall drag you in chains behind an offal wagon. I will make this planet a wasted wilderness before I let you win, Jethor!"

She turned again so that her back was to him. And he saw the face in the frame. It was his own. His thumb flicked the switch, but not in time to halt the rising note of triumphant, mocking laughter.

She knew of the hidden teletalk he had installed within her chambers....

Cobwebs. So fine, myriads of them hiding the scene, distorting it. The darkness beyond. Once more the frenzied parting of their sticky twining. Darkness. Cold. The cold of outer space—

"BILL! COME out of it!"

It was a face he was peering at, but a face of many planes, cubes superimposed on cubes, the nose where the right eye should be, one ear seemingly growing from the center of the forehead. The cubes shifted, separated, fell apart, and the face resolved itself into something human. More, it was a familiar face—Wyman Galbraith's.

Hadley's laughter was a tremulous sound, pitched on a high note of hysteria. He stopped, gritted his teeth and closed his eyes again. Once again he felt the wild desire, but this time it was not to be denied. He flung an arm out, shoved Galbraith aside and lurched to the bathroom. Presently he reappeared. He beld tightly to the door with one hand and blinked at the man in the chair.

Wyman got up abruptly, stepped to Hadley's side and helped him back to the sofa. "There'll be coffee up soon, and some bismuth. They must have used a narcotic. Soon as we get some coffee in you, and the bismuth, you'll begin to feel better."

Shortly there was a knock at the door and Wyman said, as he opened it, "Must be the bellhop. Aah. Fine. I'll take it." He turned, tray in hand, and brought it to the chair beside the sofa. "First the black coffee. Go on...."

It was hot as blazes but tasted good. And it stayed down. Wyman poured another cup from the silver pot and forced Hadley to drink that also.

"Now—no, don't try to get up.

Plenty of time for that." Wyman placed a gentle hand on the other's chest and shoved him back to a reclining position. "Wait till your head clears and your feet can move where you want them to."

The only sounds in the room were the harsh breathing of the man on the sofa and the electrical snipping of the seconds of the clock. Then, later, there were only the mechanical sounds.

"I'm all right now," Hadley said. His head ached and there was a dull feeling in his stomach, but he was thinking again. "Seems you've appointed yourself my guardian angel, Galbraith. What happened?"

Galbraith smiled in a pleased manner. "Two things, my friend. The extra large bump of curiosity with which I am afflicted, and an excellent memory. No, this time it was not coincidence which led me to Ricci's Restaurant and found me there when you were being assisted into the cab by a white-jacketed waiter and your girlfriend—"

"Knockout drops! In the wine!" Hadley sat up straight; complete awareness of what had happened made his hands double into involuntary fists.

"Precisely. Although what the medium employed is something of which I am ignorant. But let me proceed from the beginning. As of last night. Two things troubled me when I left you. One, I knew you had forgotten my advice the instant it was given. Second, the name William Hadley was a familiar one. I remembered finally but had to wait till morning for corroboration. Although I felt that my advice was wasted, I also presumed on your good sense."

IF THE GIRL called, I assumed you would do nothing about it until

the next day at least.

"The next morning I had a file clerk bring the letter I had filed away, the letter from the Keith Radio Workshop, and signed by one William Hadley, asking for a copywriter."

"Copywriter? Then you're with Brandon Personnel," Hadley said.

"Right. I waited till lunch and took a chance. The letter heading said you were branch manager, therefore I reckoned you had your secretary keep a schedule of your appointments. I called at lunch, hoping you were out. You were, but your secretary was in. I must admit luck was with me...."

"Thank God for that," Hadley said fervently.

"I pretended I was a friend from out of town, had only until nightfall and was going to be tied up all afternoon. I wondered if I could reach you at your hotel. She said I probably could and would give me the number, but that you were dining out with your fiancée and she had no idea when you would get home. I called forth all my histrionic ability and sounded distressed, wondered if she knew what the restaurant was. She did. Ricci's. You didn't see me, although you could have put out your hand and touched me."

"Well, I'll be damned!"

"You almost were, my friend. I knew it was no time for gentle measures. I yanked the girl out of the cab rather roughly, and when the waiter saw what I had in my hand he decided retreat was the better part of discretion."

"I don't get it. What did you have in your hand?"

It was a gun. Galbraith displayed it with noticeable pride. "The same gun the girl had last night. Don't you recall? She dropped it when I slammed into her and I picked it up."

"Yes, I remember." Hadley rose, took a turn about the room and returned to stand before Galbraith. A grim smile played about the lips of the younger man, but it did not match the bleak look in his eyes. "Cathy meant to finish off tonight what she was prevented from doing last night. I don't know her plans, but they were well laid." He looked off into the blankness of space.

GALBRAITH said nothing. He looked up at the other with a narrowed, oddly speculative expression.

Hadley continued: "Poor Ric! He turned out to be the instrument of—I suppose Fate is the word. No wonder she looked horrified when he offered her a drink out of the Chianti bottle. She knew it was full of what I was going to be full of. The way she put her hands out as if to push the bottle away. And how she changed when he saw what kind of wine it was and sent for another bottle. That's when I turned stubborn. I'd been drinking bourbon with a customer, and wine was something I wanted no part of. But just to be ornery, I drank..." He shook his head in remembrance. "Now I'm going to tell you a thing or two that may surprise you. To begin with, I don't think Cathy Moore is Cathy Moore."

"I don't understand," Galbraith said.

"I think you do. More than you let on. We'll talk about that later. I watched her pretty closely tonight. You can't help but notice, subconscious or otherwise, the hundred and one little things in a person with whom you've had a great deal to do. Such things as mannerisms, expressions, likes and dislikes. I added them up tonight and came to the conclusion that Cathy Moore who sat across

from me tonight was not the girl I knew the day before yesterday."

"You look like I'm making a great deal of to-do about nothing. On the contrary, the more I think on it the more sense it makes. She called last night with the sole view of making a date. First it was to be in the park. I vetoed that. I think she was prepared for my no. All she wanted was for a definite place to be named. Good! Now, she knew Tony as well as I, knew we always sat at his table. When the new waiter showed up, she showed little interest. Then, when we began on the subject of what happened last night, she suddenly decided not to talk. Even when I told her about the gun-pulling stunt.

"Cathy, the real Cathy, would have been horrified. This one was...bored. Now about you. You said last night you were just passing by. But you jumped out from between some bushes. You must have been waiting there, must have followed us."

"Wait a minute, Bill. Your rationalizing about Cathy holds water. But don't stray afield on the coincidence of my appearance. I make it a nightly habit to walk alone. As for being in the park at the same time, I live on the edge of it. No. Let me assure you it was a matter of luck...."

IT WAS FOOLISH to argue with Galbraith, Hadley suddenly realized. The man had the sort of analytical mind which could tear holes in any story or idea which Hadley might put forth. To continue would be to hold himself up to ridicule. And he couldn't discuss his dream with Galbraith. There was only one thing he could do....

He turned away from the other, closed his eyes and set his ego free, let it soar, released it from bondage. The utter, incredible cold of outer

space. The freedom of infinity was his on the instant.

He opened his eyes and found himself staring into a mirror. Returning the look with an almost foolish expression was the face of Jethor, King of Mars. Instantly, the face of the King composed itself.

"*You came of your own will," the King said.*

"Yes," Hadley said. "I suppose the answer was there all the time, but it wasn't till this instant that I knew what had happened to me." His eyes, the eyes of the King, widened at the realization that no words were being spoken. Two co-existent egos were holding conversation in the mind of Jethor.

"*I am not too surprised," Jethor said. "As a matter of fact, I am rather pleased. On your return there will be two against one."*

The King was satisfied with the mirror's reflection. It showed a strong face, with the rigid discipline of many years' training, the handiwork of a single-minded goal. It displayed none of the artifices or weaknesses of common man. All these had been carefully ironed out. Mars would have a strong ruler!

"What do you mean?" Hadley asked.

"*No matter what the fight, one must feel justice is on his side. If you are to do battle against Hedro, Queen of Nether Mars, you must feel the justice and honor of your position. Did she offer an explanation of her attempts against your life?" Jethor asked.*

"How do you know of that?"

"*When I made the transference of egos, I wanted to protect myself and you also. The machine could send one or many. I chose Romot to go as protection. He has done well, I believe."*

"You mean the man I know as Galbraith is this Ramat?"

A SMALL wrinkle appeared on Jethor's brow, but only for an instant. *"There is a soying on Mars that the swiftest runner started from a cowl. It isn't fair of me to expect an intimate knowledge from you about what has gone on. Therefore, I will start you to crawling and shortly you will be running."*

"We are now two-in-one. But two-in-one of what? Obviously, not as recognizable beings. Yet we exist in simultaneity. This existence has been labeled soul! The riddle of soul-existence has never been explained, perhaps never will be to satisfaction. Yet, there is no question of it. Sheer reason alone, analysis, rationalization and all the qualities of thought-consciousness lead to one conclusion, a mystery existence within-without ourselves: the soul-existence. Some call it ego, others have their own labels. We are all prone to labeling things: good and evil, right and wrong. Thus we come to soul. For in the last analysis, when all reason fails, our soul tells us unerringly what is what."

"I'm beginning to understand. You projected your soul into mine and merged the two."

"By mechanical means. As a first step to greater things. These you will see, and understand then why you must help me. For I will confess needing your help."

The private bedchamber of the King was in rather simple taste, hut the room into which he stepped was a magnificent example of elegance and function. Close at hand were all the conveniences which he found necessary, yet in forms which were artful. The King's personal guard snapped to rigid attention at his entrance. Jethor moved with lithe grace to his favorite

reclining couch and fell to fondling the jewel at his throat. A servant wheeled in the straight-line desk on which were compact machines for his daily use.

Jethor flicked a switch and spoke in a low voice: "Ramat, I have something of interest for you. Of even greater importance than that which occupies your time now—"

"There is only one person I trust on all Mars. Ramat. He is the most honest, ethically speaking, man I know. He hates and abhors war. If possible, he would persuade me to declare an armistice. But he too knows Hedra and the impossibility of reasoning with her. Therefore, much as he hates it, he feels that with justice on our side, we will win. Here he is now—"

RAMAT'S tall, rather angular body was framed within the doorway. He moved toward the King at Jethor's beckoning finger. His lined face, seamed with deep thought and deeper feelings, was set in its worn pattern of concentrated attentiveness.

"I was devising a grant of rights for our people for that day in the future when we have won and peace will reign," Ramat said.

"It can wait. I have news. Soul-transference has taken place in reverse. At this very moment. And soon..."

"Soon..." Ramat echoed.

Jethor's eyes widened in slow amusement at the other's incredulous look. But that look was swiftly erased.

"You see, Earth-soul, how well-trained Ramot is, how the years of service to his King have taught him to conceal his emotions. He knows of what I speak, yet also knows that a gesture, a word, and all is lost. The spies and spying devices of Hedra are as efficient as mine. Therefore, he will not betray me by even a sign."

Now and then I feel a small thought of wonder about his honesty, but in all fairness erase that thought. Wonder, doubt, suspicion—the three steps leading to certain death on Mars. He alone knows of the machine I have invented, the machine which reduces all matter to its original form, energy, and transfers it to any given place. The machine is ready for its proving. It cannot fail!"

"Yes, Ramat, soon victory will be ours," Jethor said.

"And what of the Queen-soul in the Earth girl?"

"A problem shortly to be settled, Ramat. But for the moment, sit at my side. I would see how Siramir is holding out. The reports are not good."

Jethor flicked another switch and the hidden glow of lights faded and died, to be replaced by the ball of light on the ceiling. Presently a vast scene was unfolded. An immense city lay revealed before their eyes. It was entirely surrounded by a huge wall of strange gleaming metal. And surrounding the wall, stretching in a seemingly endless line, were literally millions of warriors. Thunderbolts of light crashed against the walls, exploding into incandescent flame. Gaping holes were to be seen in the metallic bastion. Machines could be seen at some distance from the walls sending their rays of energy at the protective wall, while other machines threw umbrellas of rays overhead, to explode and cascade down upon the defenders and helpless citizens.

NOR WERE the defenders entirely helpless. They also had machines, weapons of power. Entire masses of men, on both sides, disappeared into puffs of tiny balls of smoke as the integrator-rays struck. But it was apparent to Jethor and Ramat that it was but a matter of time until the

breaches the siege machines were making in the walls would be large enough for the attackers to get through without fear of harm. For these walls were impregnated with energy and the touch of it was instant death.

Already the chosen advance strikers were on the march, protected by the greatest display of protective fire yet. Their uniforms, treated metallic coveralls which covered them from head to toe, protected them against anything but a direct hit of an integrator-beam.

Then the first wave went through the breaches and the fighting grew more fierce. The defenders, soldiers and citizens alike, threw themselves with the wildest fury on the attackers. Life meant nothing, and it seemed as though death were being deliberately courted.

But to no avail. The last they saw, as Jethor flicked the switch, was the great mass of the main body moving forward, on foot and mobile unit, to the taking and sacking of the city...

A convulsive shudder shook Ramat. Jethor threw him a pitying look. "You see but the one side, Ramat. You always have. Needless killing is what you think it. That victory is never bloodless is something you cannot understand."

"Nor will I ever," Ramat said. "I beg leave to return to my work. Soon it too will be done."

"The granting of rights to the people, eh? Yes, Ramat, they shall have all that is their due when victory is ours. Go. I give you leave."

"He is as my right arm, Earth-soul. A good and kindly man. But he is a philosopher, and in our society there is no room for such. He can never understand that there must be death before there can be life. In the dying of this planet there was created the life force in those ancient scientists to

build the vast underground cities in which we live. The great giver of energy, the sun, gave us life without death. On the surface of Mars are vast pipe lines, a hundred miles in circumference, through which flows the energy of the sun, to be stored for all the needs and uses of any future generations on Mars. Those people you watched die will give birth to the freedom they died for. They fought so that others may live. Is that bad?"

"No. I'm not a philosopher or moralist, but even I can see the right in what you do."

"Then you will do as I ask?"

"What is that?"

"Kill the girl on your return—"

"Kill Cathy?"

"Yes. For she is possessed of the Queen-soul, and on her death the soul will also die. This is the issue, the true issue. Hedra feels it is her personal mission to lead the way to the domination of the Universe. She will ruin and lay waste to accomplish that domination. Without her ego, her will, her son!—and all these are one—she is doomed to failure and I will conquer!"

"Suppose I don't succeed? There isn't any guarantee that I will."

"I will still conquer. The matter-transference machine will be the deciding factor. There is after all a limited amount of manpower available to either of us on Mars. With the machine I can draw on the vaster resources of Earth or Venus. But with her death the struggle will terminate more quickly."

"The gratitude of all the peoples on Mars will be yours on the success of your mission."

"I love Cathy. But the Queen will never let go while I am alive. What must be, must be. I will try to kill her—before she kills me..."

THE TRANSITION again—cold of outer space and the feeling of flight on wings of infinite speed. Hadley opened his eyes and turned to face Galbraith. Although he had no way of knowing how much time had elapsed, Hadley guessed not too much of it had gone by.

Galbraith was still seated, still looking at him with that intent stare, that lifted eyebrow. Hadley passed a fretful hand across his suddenly feverish forehead. There were things to be said and decisions to be reached and he knew Galbraith would not like what he had to say. Perhaps might not even go along...

"I know everything now," Hadley spoke directly, but in cautious tones.

"I don't know what you mean."

"I know about Jethor, Hedra and you, Ramat-Galbraith."

It was as if Galbraith had pulled a mask over his face. His features seemed held in suspension, as though he were waiting for something to happen, something which he feared, yet knew was inevitable.

Hadley went on: "I had intended telling you of the dream I had earlier, but changed my mind. I guess I knew you'd talk me out of it and I didn't want to be talked out of it. Instead, I let my will go free. I have just returned from Mars, Galbraith."

The mask slipped a little, exposing the sadness in the other's eyes. "I knew that one day you would," Galbraith said.

"Yes. I don't know the mechanics of it, but it seems that Jethor's and my will or ego or whatever you want to call it, merged. I lay there in his brain, all nice and snug and warm and open-eared, and listened to his thoughts come to me; and sometimes I answered them with my own. He is a great man."

The mask went all the way down.

"No! He led you as he leads all the others."

"I thought the same thing. His speech was so courtly, so carefully worded, yet so vital. I got the impression of tremendous vitality, of infinite discipline. And at the last, instead of hammering the phrase which should have decided me in his favor, he spoke as simply as one plain man to another. That is why I believe him and must do what he asked of me."

Galbraith had noticed the caution in voice as Hadley began to speak and had also heard how, as the other went on, the caution was forgotten. He took a deep, quivering breath and held up his hand. "Wait, Bill. You say you've made up your mind. I know what you mean. You're going to kill Cathy Moore."

"No. She is already dead. I'm going to kill the ego-will-soul of Hedra."

"Jethor twisted you around his finger, Bill. Maybe I shouldn't say that. Maybe you think you're a man and an intelligent one and nobody can twist you if you don't want them to. I know the man, Bill. He is more vicious than the woman."

"He said he trusts you as he would a brother."

"Words. He trusts no one. I don't know what he did or what he showed you or what he said, but of this I'm sure. He told you it was Hedra's sole purpose to rule the Universe, and to accomplish that she must first conquer Mars." He saw he had scored a bull's-eye and gained confidence. "He must have explained the machine's purpose also. To bring the manpower of Earth to Mars. Listen carefully: he need bring only one man and he knows the machine can work. It can also work in reverse. The super-science of Mars in the hands of even a small army would make short work of making Earth a captive on the wheel of Mars'

war chariot."

WAS GALBRAITH right? Had he been duped by a clever man, by a man for whom he had no standards of judgment? Then he remembered what Jethor had said about Ramat. That the High Minister would try to make peace by any means other than violent. That only Ramat's belief in Jethor's cause made him stay in the King's camp.

"Jethor was right. I don't know Hedra, but she is evil. I know it. All right, Galbraith. I'll give you a chance to talk me out of an attempt on her life. What would you want me to do?"

"Let things remain as they are. Jethor has no power over you so long as he cannot subjugate your will. Nor can he know what goes on. I am Ramat, yet Ramat knows nothing of what is being said here. It is not the minds which merged and became one; it is the will! All this lies in the subconscious. True, Cathy Moore is dead to you, but only while the Queen holds Cathy's will captive. Kill Cathy and you may also kill the merged wills of the two. May. The chances are that you won't! The chances are that the Queen will release her will the instant before death strikes. But what has Jethor to lose? Nothing. He knows the Queen's body and mind are still on Mars."

I can't listen to him, Bill kept telling himself. He'd talk me out of my bridgework with a filet in front of my nose. And he says Jethor is slick. He's even slicker. He doesn't want either of them to die, yet he wants the slaughter to end.

"What's the real reason for not wanting me to kill Cathy?"

"If it served any practical purpose, I would say do as you wish. But killing one evil entity accomplishes nothing if the other one remains free."

"You lose. Now, give me the gun in your pocket and don't try holding out because I'll just take it from you the hard way. Believe me, I can."

GALBRAITH smiled wryly and tossed Hadley the gun. "If I can't persuade you on moral grounds, perhaps common sense will work. Cathy has at least one man and maybe more helping her. Have you forgotten the waiter?"

"The guy who took Tony's place. Of course. Well, this .38 makes it a little more even."

Galbraith stood up, stretched and moved toward the door.

"Where are you going?" Hadley asked.

"To the same place as you. Have you forgotten I am your protector?"

"Fine. We'll go together. Wait till I slip on a jacket." He stepped to the closet, noticed that Galbraith had hung his suit coat neatly on a hanger and took it off and slipped it on. The gun fit clumsily in the pocket and was so patent anyone would have noticed it. He tried the hip pocket. Worse. He finally slipped it between the waistband of his trousers and his shirt. "I feel like a hoodlum," he said as he stepped forward to join Galbraith at the door.

"I don't imagine Miss Moore went back to her hotel," Galbraith said as he put his hand on the doorknob.

Hadley looked blank. Then the words made sense. He had forgotten Galbraith's role in his rescue. It seemed obvious that Cathy wouldn't go back to her hotel. It seemed the most reasonable thing for her to assume Hadley would not forgive the second attempt on his life. And that on his revival he would call the police.

"I wasn't thinking," Hadley admitted ruefully. He teetered on his heels and looked up at the transom, eyes

half closed in thought. "So let's think—out loud. Now she's either miles from here, running like hell, or she's not. Running from me will never get me laid out on a mortician's table, something we both know she's desirous of.

"First, however, how much time since you grabbed me from their clutches?"

Galbraith looked at his wrist watch. "Two hours about."

"How long before you got me out of the dope?"

"Twenty-five minutes at the most."

"One more question; did they carry me out or was I helped out?"

"Helped. Your feet were dragging somewhat, but you weren't out completely."

"Then she knew there wasn't a lethal dosage in the bottle. Let's say she also knows how long it takes for the stuff to wear off. Now, if we don't believe her running from here, then we have to believe she's still around. Hiding someplace? I can't buy that, Galbraith. It would be as useless to her aim as running would. No! Cathy and her pal or pals are either in this hotel, or right outside close by. What's more, all we have to do is stay right here in this room and Cathy Moore will walk right to us."

GALBRAITH blinked a couple of times in astonishment, then nodded gently. "I would say that your deduction stems from as fine a bit of analytical reasoning as ever I've heard. Too bad you did not analyze as well when you were with Jethor. What do you plan on doing?"

"What else can we do but make ourselves comfortable and wait the lady's arrival?"

While Hadley busied himself in turning out all the lights but the

shaded one on the desk, Galbraith shoved the chair over against the wall and made himself as comfortable as he could in the overstuffed club chair. Hadley surveyed the darkened room with an air of contentment.

"Should I say 'come into my parlor' to her when she arrives?"

But Galbraith had adopted an air of watchful waiting and did not seem to think the other's remark amusing. Hadley shrugged and decided silence was perhaps the better course. He seated himself on the Lawson sofa opposite Galbraith on the club chair, and sat pensive and brooding.

The sudden knock on the door brought him upright with a startled jerk. "Who is it?"

A voice trying desperately not to be frightened, replied, "The bellhop, sir. With the sandwiches."

Galbraith whispered, "I told him to bring some up in a half hour. Thought you might be hungry."

Hadley slipped the gun from where he had it and motioned for Galbraith to open the door. He stood to one side flat against the wall beside the door, out of sight of anyone entering unless they turned toward him on stepping past the threshold.

The gun, held against himself, covered the door's opening.

GALBRAITH opened the door and stepped back as the bellhop took a step forward. Then the man who stood behind the bellhop put his knee up against the boy's haunches and shoved. The tray and sandwiches scattered to one side as the boy staggered forward, stumbled, and plunged headlong against the desk. His head struck with a dull thud and his face hit the floor. He twitched for a second, then lay still.

The man who had done the kicking moved into the room. Cathy Moore was a step behind. Hadley acted with

efficient smoothness. Two quick steps and he was at the girl's side. He shoved her to the wall and closed the door with an almost simultaneous movement. Then he was shoving the gun hard against the dark-faced man's back, although still keeping half turned to Cathy.

"Drop it." The words seemed almost casual.

The gunman didn't want to find out how casual Hadley was. The gun fell to the floor.

Hadley kicked it toward Galbraith without looking at it. "Keep it on them," he said.

Galbraith was on his knees at the boy's side. He reached out, grabbed the gun and pocketed it.

"How's the kid?" Hadley asked.

"Alive. Unconscious, though. Got a nasty crack on the skull."

"Just so he's alive. All right, tough guy. Up against the wall. Face it and get your hands up over your head."

The man obeyed without hesitation.

"Me too, Bill?" Cathy asked.

"No. You and I are going to have a little talk first."

"Then what?"

His shoulders moved in a faint shrug. "Who knows? Depends on the answers, maybe. I once asked you 'why' but never got an answer. Think you'd have one for me now?"

She moved slowly toward him, and as she walked she held her hands out to him in a supplicating gesture. He let her come all the way. Then, as she stood facing him with only inches separating them, he stuck the gun in her side.

"Just in case you get ideas, Cathy."

"I once had an idea about love. It seems very long ago, now."

His lean, smooth face became lined in bitterness. "Fine words. A little late, Cathy. Why?" The word was a whisper and a demand.

She looked up into his pain-filled

eyes. "I don't know. I just have to. You've got to die, Bill."

"But I'm not going to, Cathy. You're the one who's going to die. The difference is I know why."

"If you know why, then that's all that matters. If you'll be better off for it, I want you to kill me, Bill."

There was something terribly wrong. There was hunger and pain and utter love and belief in her eyes. They should have been terror-stricken or wild with anger, not look as they did.

Suddenly her eyes became wide and fixed. "Bill! What am I doing here? Why—why are you holding the gun in my side?"

Kill her. Kill her before your knees turn to water and it runs up to your brain and leaks out of your eyes.

The last words of doom: "I've got to, Cathy."

Then his finger was tightening on the trigger, squeezing it. Once and again and a third time. The fourth, fifth and sixth squeezes were frantic. The gun was empty of shells!

"YOU BUM!" He shoved Cathy off and whirled on Galbraith. "I didn't bother to look. You soft-soaping bum. You tricked me." He spoke without heat, but his voice was edged with hoarseness.

"If I hadn't," Galbraith said softly, "you would have killed her just now. You're utterly blind and deaf, my friend." His completely matter-of-fact voice made a shabby bit of acting out of Hadley's violence.

It was then the man they had all forgotten acted with a speed surprising in one so squat and thick. He had been edging toward Galbraith a step at a time. Now, he took the last step in a single quick move, snatched the gun from the limp fingers and took two steps to the side, out of reach of the other should Galbraith attempt getting his gun.

Cathy's eyes moved from the gunman to Hadley and back again. "What are you going to do?"

"Give it to him. That's what we're here for, ain't it? That's what you hired me to do."

Before he could divine her intention, she leaped on Hadley, twining her arms around him, trying to bury her body in his. Her head burrowed against his chest.

"Darling," she whispered brokenly. "He's right. I don't know why—I don't know why."

The gunman was getting impatient. "Come on. Get away from him, or I let you have it too."

The meaning of Galbraith's words was suddenly clear to Hadley, with the shocking effect of a hammer blow. Cathy was no longer possessed by Hedra's evil ego. His hand came up and began a tender caressing of her hair, then the fingers slid down and went under her chin and lifted her head.

"Darling," he whispered. "You've come back to me. The Cathy I never thought I'd know again. You're back."

She gave the last drop of her love in the return of his kiss, nor did she want anything else but the continued pressure of his lips on hers. . . .

THE SLATE-COLORED eyes of the gunman shifted abruptly at a sudden movement from the man in the chair. He had risen and was standing stiffly erect, eyes staring at a spot directly above the two locked in embrace. Galbraith's lips moved, but in silence. As if in prayer.

At that instant, Ramat's will removed itself from that of the Earthman and returned to him.

Hadley felt the convulsive movement of the girl's body, heard the moan of pain she gave and beld her away from him. "Cathy! What's wrong?"

She tried to answer but her face twisted again in terrible agony. "I—I'm being—torn apart—"

He started to speak again, but the words died in a strangling sob. A vise had closed on him and was twisting itself into his body. He sobbed horribly once more, felt the strangling bonds reach up to his brain—and for the last time knew the utter cold of outer space.

IT WAS A room of squarish dimensions, with a low ceiling painted in neutral colors. A diffused bluish-white light was spread evenly throughout the room from a hidden source. A tall spare man in a greyish smock stood at the side of a squat machine from which a multitude of wires spread to a complex motor attached to, but separate from, the machine itself. There was a circular window-like opening about head high. A pale green light glowed within the circle. The side against which the man stood was plain but for two knobs and a like amount of dials.

The air in the room was sharp with the fragrance of mountain pine.

The man turned. Lines so deep they might have been etched with acid sliced into both cheeks and along the flanged aquiline nose. The eyes were deep-set but alive with an oddly quiet triumph. The face was that of an ascetic, or scholar. It was the face of Ramat, High Minister to Jethor, King of Mars.

He spoke to the young couple in low, moderate tones: "I was afraid that I might be too late. The guards in whom I had placed my trust and fate betrayed me. I had to work quickly then. Jethor would not delay long in seeking me out, and this room is not impregnable. But it was I who won out."

"You were the only one," Hadley said, "who knew the King was building

this machine, and you beat him to it. Why?"

"Not quite the same machine," Ramat corrected Hadley. "I built it to circumvent Jethor. But our company is not quite complete. A moment..." He turned again and fiddled with one of the knobs, then twisted the dial to a new position.

The light glowed vividly green, then subsided to its previous paler color.

Cathy gasped in fright and Hadley turned to see the reason for it. There had been nothing before. Now, a woman stood revealed. Her blue-black shoulder-length hair shone dully. Her eyes were slue-colored, and within their depths hidden sparks sent out slivers of light. Her forehead was wide and smooth, the firm proud chin was strong and sure.

She looked like the queen she was—Hedra, of Nether Mars.

Ramat's head bent slightly. "Your Majesty..."

For the instant of her arrival she was frightened. But it took only a second for recovery. Her eyes became round and sparkling at sight of the squat shape. "Ramat. Why have you brought me here?"

"To show you what I have made," came the suave reply.

"I am not blind. Why, Ramat? To make me a peace offering?"

He shook his head. "You are aware of its potential, I think."

"Matter transference. The one thing in which my scientists have failed me."

"Who holds this machine, holds Mars. Jethor has built a similar one."

She grew pale at the words. "Ramat, I hold no enmity against you. A bargain. Join me and name what you will; it will be granted."

"An immediate end to the war. Your abdication, and a free election. And last, the weapons of war to be scrapped to the last piece."

"No!"

He smiled. "I did not think so. You would be an empty symbol without war. Jethor always said there was no place for philosophy on Mars, or for philosophers. There will be one day."

The name of the King stirred her. "Jethor—where is he?"

"He will be here soon. He is blasting his way through the walls. But not knowing the full extent of my achievement, he is using a hand-ray pistol. He is afraid a heavier weapon will destroy us."

"Jethor afraid? You must be mad."

"The sanest of us all, I hope," Ramat said with odd accent.

"You're a fool, Ramat," the Queen said bitterly. "Jethor will talk you out of it. And we will all be the losers."

"You but prove my contention," Ramat said. "Below your show of spirit and courage lies an inner weakness, a fear of the invulnerability of Jethor. Although he mentioned stalemate, he knew he would win. Jethor had the confidence of his belief in his own destiny. That was why he could argue so well. The King never doubted for an instant that what he was doing was for the good of all, even when it meant the sacrificing of millions of people's lives. It was to their benefit to die."

"Earthling, would you open the door to his Majesty?"

THE KING showed only momentary surprise at sight of Hedra. The sternness fell away from his face and he relaxed as he gave the room and those within a searching look. "You set a fine stage, Ramat."

"Send the guards back," Ramat said. His fingers were tense on the dial, although his voice held to a normal tone.

"Jethor has no need of guards," the King said. He shook his head abruptly, and the men behind his framed figure fell back out of sight.

"Close the door, Earthling," Ramat commanded.

Jethor shot Hadley a quick glance as Hadley closed the door again and moved back to stand with his arm encircling Cathy's waist.

"Earthling, eh? Methinks this is the shell where once my spirit resided. You have done well, Ramat. I am helpless. Had I known you were also building a machine, I would never have gone through the mental agony of building on my own."

"The King forgot, then, that he took Ramat from his scientific seat at the University of Uvarti to make him his High Minister?"

"Jethor has forgotten nothing," the King said. "What is it you expect of me, Ramat? There can be no compromises, I have lived without them, and am quite willing to die without them."

"I but want to remind the King," Ramat said, "that my machine cancels his out. So long as I remain in control of this dial, which is focused on the energy beam potential-cone of your machine, there can be no integration of energy by which means only can matter transference be made. I offer the same conditions I made Hedra: abdication and the scrapping of all war material."

Jethor gave Hedra a sidelong look. "I see she has refused your offer. I can be no less a King than she a Queen."

Ramat shrugged his thin shoulders. "I expected the answer you gave. Very well then. I have made peace with my conscience. Your deaths will be the great gain for all Mars. The thousands of years of past achievements will now be put to the use of

all, and not for the military alone. There will be space travel to other planets, but on peaceful missions, not for conquest. I will put an end to all wars by putting an end to those who make wars."

"You cannot be other than what your nature compels you to be," Jethor said soberly. "Nor can you act otherwise. It is not in your nature to kill. I do not believe you capable of murder."

"I have thought long and hard on it," Ramat spoke quietly, with dignity. "I would have killed you long ago. But Hedra would still have been alive. Which is the reason why I did not kill her immediately on bringing her here. The two of you had to be together. Now, go to her side, Jethor, else I kill you now."

JETHOR MARCHED past Ramat without hesitation or fear. His face was wiped smooth of emotion. Nor did Ramat see the signal flash from his eyes as he stepped by. Hedra did and divined his purpose.

"Are we to pose together, or is the angle too great for the machine to cover as we had been?" Jethor asked as he stood by the side of the woman.

"What the problem is will make small difference," Ramat said. He was beginning to show the strain he was under. His eyes were tightly drama at the corners; the lines in his face seemed like spher cuts now. His voice was a shallow toneless whisper: "It is for the future I do this—"

Jethor's hand came up with an odd deliberation for one so military. It was as if he knew he stood no chance against the other. Yet Jethor's reflexes were more swift than Ramat's. It was a matter of who moved more swiftly, the hand lifting the gun or the fingers twisting the dial.

The fingers won.

And on the instant, as if they had

never existed, the figures of the Earthlings disappeared. The King and Queen looked into the glass window and saw a ball of bronze flame, and for a second seemed to see a pair of infinitely small figures set against the ball. Then, only the sun was to be seen again. It could have been an illusion....

"How did you know?" Bill Hadley asked.

"The King's mind is an open book. I saw the answering flash in Hedra's eyes when the King passed me and knew he had signalled her. He stood to win if he succeeded, and there was no reason for him not to. That is, had I not known the strange twistings of that intellect. They projected their wills into yours and forced yours into theirs. But this time there was an actual transference, not alone of wills but of the whole mental concept. He should have understood by your very presence what I intended and why I had brought Hedra here also. The Earth girl had to have a body. I said my machine was different, and not alone in that it cancelled his out but also in that it could make the mental transfer as well as the physical.

"Knowing my hatred of murder, he should have known that I would not kill two innocents. He will never know now, that I let him dupe himself...."

A look of infinite sadness filled his eyes.

But neither the man nor the woman saw it. His arms were about her and she was straining the lovely body close against his. Their lips met in a kiss that seemed to set their brains afire. Suddenly she moved back a step.

"Bill, I'm only half dressed."

"Yes, my sweet," he said, as he lifted her face to his again. "I noticed that the second she showed up, Queen...."

This time she did not step back.

THE END

READER'S PAGE

THE GOOD—AND THE BAD

Dear Editor:

That fellow, Dr. Carpenter, really gave you a word-lacing, didn't he? Threw the proverbial monkey wrench into the works. I have a feeling that some of his beliefs were truly justified—but some were not. I shall try to compare my opinions with his.

First: He states that your magazine is nothing but worthless trash. Maybe all professional men think FA is trash—I don't know. Certainly the majority of your fans are not professional people. I don't think FA is trash, and there are many, many others who think as I do. We are not the high-minded professionals, though.

Second: I have not read FA as long as Dr. Carpenter, so he may have a point in stating that you do not follow the suggestions of the fans. I and the rest of fandom sincerely hope that he is wrong. Of course, some of the changes suggested are impossible. But many are worth examining. Let's hope that some improvements are made. Dr. Carpenter is justified in suggesting that you make some improvements—a good many of them.

Third: I would not call your magazine cheap, nor would I call it haphazardly put together. It is better than a few others in some respects.

Fourth: I do not think that FA and AS will fold—at least I hope not. Some stories are good, some are bad. But there are enough good ones to keep it from folding.

Now I would like to make a few criticisms. I shall start on the cover and work toward the back.

THE COVER: The covers are good—and don't let anyone tell you they're not. There is one disappointment, however. One artist spoils everything. Why not let Jones do every other cover and have someone else fill in the gaps? A little variety would never hurt your covers.

AUTOBIOGRAPHIES: This feature of "Men Behind Fantastic Adventures" is one of the best additions you've ever put into FA. A truly interesting feature. Keep it.

THE EDITORIAL: This is really an up-and-down affair. Sometimes it's good—sometimes it isn't. It depends on your writing mood, no doubt. This could certainly improve.

THE STORIES: The shorts are usually the better stories of the magazine. Once in a while you have a good lead novel—this time you didn't. "Dark Benediction" should

have occupied the position—it was the best story in the magazine. The shorts were all good.

INTERIOR ILLUS: These are usually below average—only once in a while do you get a good Finlay illus. But this time you had a good Cartier illus. That made up for the poor ones. It was the only one I thought was worth printing.

THE ARTICLES: Phooey! Throw them out! One or two longer and more interesting ones would do. You have too many and they become boring after a while.

THE READER'S PAGE: Good. I would like to see one change, though. You could make a few more comments on them. And stop passing over the ones filled with brickbats with the "Oh, well" attitude! You could at least defend yourself!

THE ADS: I know you need money to publish the magazine, but why must you always get it from the same places? Ugh!

Well, that about does it. Let's hope that a few changes, as I suggested, are made. I don't care about trimmed edges or a different size. Just good stories—especially lead novels—and good artwork. We shall see what the next issue of FA brings.

—Ultrascientifically yours,

Harold Hostetler
Box 163
Cairbrook, Pennsylvania

FOILED AGAIN!

Dear Editor:

So Ivar Jorgensen isn't a penname eh? Curious! Foiled again by Postum! At least someone besides myself made the same mistake...

Well, here I go again. And this time I'm about as positive as I've ever been. Aren't H. Dorset and Frank Navarro some des plumes for Leo Ramon Summers? If not, I'll quietly shoot myself (with a water gun).

Pardon on a statement I made in this issue's letter. I forgot to mention the stories Jan Romanoff cites as good examples of '48 FA novels. All of them good. Sorry, Jan.

Looking over your two previous issues, I see you printed three VERY good stories, namely: (1) "The Dead Don't Die"... terrific! (2) "Excalibur and the Atom"... VERY good. (3) "The Traveling Crab"... VERY good. These stories are in order of my preference.

Your new artist, Ed Valigursky, is very good. Keep him. And you now have Edd Carter! Swell! Now let's see if you can hold him. Man, what with Finlay, Lawrence, Carter, Roth, Sharp, and Valigursky, you've got a bunch of artists! Oh yes, mustn't forget Gerald Hohms.

Memoes to Bobby Warner: (1) As to your query about my being a female or shem's—i'm a he. (2) There was a Toka story in Planet Stories for Summer '48 called "In the Sphere of Time". By Felkie.

Terry Cair
134 Cambridge Street
San Francisco 12, Calif.

You wouldn't shoot yourself for being half right, now, would you, Terry? ...Ed.

WHO'S A TARMUT?

Dear Ed:

Wow! FA is getting better all the time. After reading the September issue I felt I just had to write my second letter. Every one of the stories rates high in my estimation. It's hard, very hard, to choose between "The Terrible Puppets" and "Dark Benediction" for first place, but after considering them both carefully I have decided upon "Dark Benediction". No other story I have read has put man in a more perilous situation.

Dr. Carpenter seems to hold views contrary to those of everyone else. Too bad he won't just read the September issue of FA. It would, without doubt, convince him he is wrong. After I read his letter I couldn't help but wonder if he wasn't a little man about seven inches tall. The way he criticizes the work of others, I wouldn't be surprised if he was found to be one of those tarmuts. Seriously, I do think he is more than a little bit confused.

That cover was one of Jones' best. It portrayed not only a scene from the story, but the story itself.

Why did McGreevey call his story "The Catpaw"? If there's really a Lee Stone-man working at FA, you'd better watch him.

For once the "Reader's Page" carried a lot of short letters instead of a few long ones. A decided improvement.

Suppose there were really a bunch of dermies running loose... Funny... I have an overwhelming desire to touch you!

Yours approachingly,
Don Smith
Box 71
Hot Springs, South Dakota

NOT UP TO PAR, HE SAYS

Dear Sirs,

I have been reading your magazine for about three months, and I think it is very good. But I think the last few issues have not been up to par. I liked your June and

July magazines very well, especially the feature novels. Your companion magazine, AS, is far better than FA. I enjoyed "Robot Men of Bubble City" very much. It is one of your best. The best books to my way of thinking are:

1. Amazing Stories
2. Galaxy
3. Thrilling Wonder Stories
4. Fantastic Adventures
5. Planet
6. Starring Stories

As a suggestion for the improvement of your books, why don't you have trimmed edges?

In your opinion, who is your best author? Inquiringly, your faithful reader

Kent Corey
Box 64
Enid, Oklahoma

As far as we're concerned, all our authors are best. Once in a while one will write an outstanding winner—once in a great while one writes one a little below his par. But as a whole, they're all our favorites.Ed.

COMES CONSCIENCE

Dear Ed,

I've been reading your sister maga, FANTASTIC and AMAZING, for well over two years now, and have selfishly accepted the wonderful stories and artwork without a word of thanks.

But finally my conscience intervened, and here I am.

First, I would like to express a few opinions on your last issues. Here's my rating.

AMAZING:

1st Place: "The Green Blood of Treachery" by Willard Hawkins

Very good, well off the beaten track.

2nd Place: "A World He Never Made" by Edwin Benson

Story was along usual lanes, but E. Benson's treatment of it makes up for it.

The rest of the stories share third place, as I can't decide between them.

FANTASTIC:

I have to praise R. G. J. for a superb cover. One of the best in a long time.

1st Place: "The Terrible Puppets" by Paul Fairman

Wonderful! Different! Well Written!

2nd Place: "Dark Benediction" by W. M. Miller, Jr.

I actually lived the part of Paul, sympathize wholeheartedly with his decision.

3rd Place: "The Catpaw" by J. McGreevey

Excellent! Implication added to suspense, though I disapprove of writers' using other author's names (not necessarily in this case) and mag titles in stories.

4th Place: "Mission Accomplished" by R. M. Williams, and "The Secret of John Marsh" by W. P. McGivern share this spot.

Many thanks for both great issues.

I hope you won't mind my putting in a little advertisement, but I'm real gone on these mags. If any of you readers should have any old mags (AMAZING or FANTASTIC, naturally) lying around, and would like to sell them, let me know. I can't get enough of them. I haunt the bookstores, but can't find very many.

Now, a few more words about the mags, before I drop down to the bookstores again. I've compared your "zines" to other mags in the same line. No comparison! Won't touch 'em! Artwork and stories don't compare to AS and FA! Printing is horrible! Sure way to eyestrain.

I may seem a bit lavish in my description of your mags, but that's how I feel.

Well, see you next month, when your latest hits the stands.

Jim O'Brien
Post Office Box 145
Haskell, New Jersey

Thanks for your comments, Jim. We'll be waiting for you next issue.Ed.

STF-TRADER REVIVED

Dear LES:

I have enjoyed FA a lot. Some wonderful stories have been in it since that first issue. I have a complete collection and also many duplicates.

Maybe there are some new fans who need back issues. The revived STF-TRADER is now being published by Jack Irwin, Box 3, Tyro, Kansas. He will gladly answer all inquiries about it. This 'zine specializes in trade and selling of back issues of all stf magazines.

Hope you will mention this in Reader's Column of FA.

K. Martin Carlson
1628 Third Avenue South
Moorhead, Minnesota

ITEMIZED LISTING

L'Editeur:

AN ITEMIZED ACCOUNT OF THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE OF FANTASTIC ADVENTURES.

ITEM ONE:

A numerical classification of the stories in the order of my preference:

(1) "Dark Benediction", a real good yarn. More by him, please.

(2) "The Catpaw", a different twist on that sort of story plus Cartier's elo made this the best short of the ish.

(3) "The Secret of John Marsh". If it wasn't so short it would be good on "Dimension X" with that ending.

(4) "The Terrible Puppets". Pretty good, but not sensational.

(5) "Mission Accomplished". The ending just didn't hit me right, but good nevertheless.

ITEM TWO:

The cover, one of R. G. J.'s better ones. I'd like more like this one.

ITEM THREE:

The interiors were pretty good this time. Cartier's was the best, by far. But I didn't care for Dorset's.

ITEM FOUR:

Say, why don't you drop the Rosierucian ad on the back cover for a while and put a cover there by Settles, as many fans have requested. Or one by Paul, on what is on other planets. Please!

ITEM FIVE:

Now to the letters:

To E. Warner. Yerry Carr is a ho.
Augmenting M. Mitchell's report on fandom in Canada, I wish to add that Chester D. Cuthbert, 54 Ellismere Ave., St. Vital, Manitoba, Canada, wants all Canadian fans to write him, giving him your present address, and a postcard. And that C. Stewart Melchette, c/o Mrs. Gwen Ormiston, Apt. 504, 1425 Taylor St., San Francisco, would like to hear from most any fan.

ITEM SIX:

Say, are you going to have a 15th Anniversary ish like AS had? You know, a big ish of 270 pages or so. Come now, don't make a big disappointment like Brother Browne did when he forgot AS's 25th Annsh.

David Rike
Box 203
Rodeo, California

FA doesn't celebrate its 15th anniversary until May 1954—so we've plenty of time to plan a whopping surprise for you. —Ed.

COLOR ILLUSTRATIONS?

Dear Editor:

Having 18 years of reading stf behind me, I now, for the first time, tender my heartfelt thanks for the excellent stories you have put out in the past.

Your September issue is pretty good. "Dark Benediction" is a story of the year, even if Miller stopped the tale a bit too soon. "The Terrible Puppets" rates fair with me. "Mission Accomplished" is definitely old stuff... 4th rate. "The Catpaw" was a good short. But how did John Marsh get away in that little rocket ship... eh? Oh... he must have built a big one? But not in that little room locked on the inside.

Now, here we go... PLEASE, let's have more good articles based on (1) The Theory of Relativity, (2) Time Travel, (3) Inter-Galactic Wars, (4) Longevity, (5) Resurrection, (6) Interdimensional Travel, and (7) Creation and Destruction of Worlds. There is no limit to imagination, and any stories based on these seven topics could be extremely exciting. Most stories like them have been in the past.

Also, if you would put in color illustrations with each story, or at least a few

of them, as well as the one on the front cover, they would dress up your mag; not only would you delight your "captured" fans, but you would gain many more. A mag like I suggest would be well worth 35c and even 45c.

If you're going to put out a good mag then **PUT OUT THE BEST AND THE MOST**, and it will be worth whatever you charge. Don't say I didn't warn you when someone beat's you to the punch, because, brother, I'll buy 'em as fast as they turn them out.

I saw the movie "The Thing"... disappointing... supposedly more intelligent than man and uttering words like a beast... intelligence tends toward peaceful acts and thoughts. We were to it was; enlarges are to us, huh? Bah, the movie was stupid.

Bye-bye for now and keep up the good work.

Your ardent fan,

Matt (SFC Joseph H. Matthews,
RA-6113598)

Instructor Co. A, S. T. R.
Camp Gordon, Georgia

ALL THE WAY FROM CHINA...

Dear Ed:

Stand back, Lidstone is taking the plunge. Well, here I am, I am not writing about last issue's stories (when you get this they will probably be reprints anyway). I am not looking for pen-pals, I am not swapping back numbers.

I should just like to congratulate you on your mag. When I get hold of FA they are usually months old, and often I have felt the urge to put typewriter to paper and join in the discussions and arguments. But, alas, then I realize that if I do, the subjects will long ago have faded by the time this would be received by you.

So I'll just say congratulations to a fine mag—and lots of luck.

P/Lt. P. L. Lidstone
c/o H. M. Prison

Outram Road, Singapore 3, Malaya

And lots of luck to you, Lt. Lidstone. You're invited to join in any discussions and any arguments going on in these columns at any time. You're always welcome, *only or info.*Ed.

...AND FROM THE PLANET OF ALTHAZT...

attention! micron trobes from althazt communicating with f-a earth, do you read me?

profreader—we use small letters on this graph because inter-planetary communications have not yet been perfected as to their use.

the september issue of f-a (earth time) was the first f-a brought to our minds via communicator from earth. we hear on althazt. believe favorably in the illustration by odd carlier from the narrative—the catspaw—the illus was brought over commendably by carrier wave. if the act is not infinitely impossible we micron trobes would appreciate it if one of you in the editor class of earthmen would send out bulletin in his favor, also include a vision of him and perspective on how he gets the stippled effect.

also in the catspaw—what does the title have to do with the construction of the narrative? we from althazt cannot make horns or hoofs of it.

please include this communication in your visual record of the next 1/12th cycle as we would like to influence earthmen in our favor.

if communicators are handy we would like to make contact with earthmen at troy new york, western sector earth,



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our translator, the only earthman we have been able to make direct contact with, is quite young (sixteen revolutions), galus from althast breaking contact.

translator—Joseph C. Belotte
2705-15th street
Troy, New York

Welcome, Althastians—to earth contact. Your communication received and reprinted intact, and may you be able to decipher our answer.

Appreciate your favorable comments re artist Edd Cartier. He gets the stippled effect in his illustrations by working very large on illustration board with grease pencil. Probably uses Korn's litho. crayon No. 2 and No. 3.

"Catpaw", according to Earth definition, means a person who is being used by another as a go-between, or a tool. And in this case, Thorne Leatham was the human puppet for the Lemus, used in an attempt to warn Earth. Perfectly simple—and logical.

Trust your interplanetary communicators will soon be decoding and all your mechanical difficulties worked out.....Ed.

HONEST, IVAR'S REALLY REAL!

Dear Ed:

Each issue of FA seems to be getting progressively better. In the September issue, Fairman's "The Terrible Puppets" read just like his stories of old. He's a fine writer, hang on to him.

I hope this bearded-man-on-the-cover thing doesn't become permanent. This one was nice and colorful, though. Interior illus seem to be picking up. Snaring Cartier and Fawcette has undoubtedly made many readers happy. All you have to do now is get Finlay back. I say back because, whenever he appears, it's strictly a one-shot.

The reader's column is full of comment-worthy letters this time. Lively, too.

Terry Carr: At least we agree on one point. You suspect Ivar Jorgensen of being a nom de plume, while I know it is. Even if Miss Shaffer won't admit it. As for the argument about FA's best years—well, I guess it's just a matter of taste.

Arline Gingold: If you think "Space Cadet" is rotten, let me suggest "Captain Video" which, in my opinion, takes the cake for the best example of how stf should not be presented on TV. However, don't be discouraged, there are two radio shows, one excellent, one mediocre. "Dimension X" is the former, while "2000 Plus" is the latter.

L. W. Carpenter: You seem to be a cynical soul. I bet you paper your walls with "Galaxy" covers. (Not a bad idea, come to think of it.) However, I must confess I agree totally with you on your opinion of AS. I don't see much in a magazine that is slanted at the "cradle trade". (Dare you to print my last sentence, LES.)

Bobby Warner: That last paragraph of

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you're should have given LES' brain a real workout. Is it code?

How about getting some copy from the following writers: deCamp, Fairman, Browne, Williams, Brown, Lesser, DeVet, Miller and (for want of his real name) Jorgensen.

In the summing up, FA is definitely on the rise. Keep the long novels coming.

Oh, yes, anybody want to trade back issues for stamps?

Jan Romanoff
26601 South Western, Apt. 341
Lomita, California

We can't imagine what you mean by Fin-
lay's being a one-shot. He's appeared in
practically every issue of our magazine for
the last six months—and will continue to
illustrate for us.

There's a new science fiction television
program called "Tales of Tomorrow" which
is one of the better shows. It comes on
every other Friday night, and stacks up
with the best of them.

As far as the AS plant is concerned, it
depends on what you mean by the "cradle
trade".... There's the child who thinks
he's too old to read "Alice in Wonderland",
and who finds when he grows up that
"Alice is too old for a child to read."

The fear issue comes to a head on p. 31
..... Ed.

A SECOND LETTER

Dear Ed:

The stories in this issue aren't as good
as in June, but I managed to read and en-
joy most of them. I rate them as follows:

- First Place: "Dark Benediction"
- Second Place: "The Terrible Puppets"
- Third Place: "Mission Accomplished"
- Fourth Place: "The Catpaw"

"The Secret of John March" is probably
the worst story I've ever read. If McGivern
can't do better than this, send him back to
the ice wagon. Ugh, what a story.

James' cover was very good, but I'm still
wondering who the guy with the whiskers
is. Are they really his, or is he breaking
them in for someone else?

On the reader's page, Mrs. Louis Wood
asks for opinions on "The Thing". To be
perfectly frank, I thought it stank.

I see you printed my letter, but what a
title—"A Fast Letter"—ouch! How about a
letter one for this one?

By the way, what goes with Burt Mull-
ver and Shot Maho? After reading your
mags for fifteen years, I still think they're
tops in their field, bar none, including
Galaxy.

D. Stewart
1004 Gates Avenue
Brooklyn 21, New York

HOW LONG IS FOREVER?

Dear Editor:

I have just read the July issue of FA,

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A FIRST LETTER FROM AN OLD FAN

Dear Editor:

It seems strange that after reading your magazine for over ten years, I should suddenly get a desire to write you a letter. However, it seemed I could never find a reason. Even as I watched the magazine grow along with AMAZING STORIES to the top it has reached today, I never could lift my pen to write. When Shaver, whom I detested, started writing for you, I didn't bring myself to telling you what I thought of his "allusion of little people". When long ago Adam Link was my hero, I still refrained from writing AMAZING STORIES and telling them how much skill Eando Binder had.

But after reading the September issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, I received an inner urge to express my opinions on your magazine.

First, for a definite change from the last few issues, the stories were excellent. Somehow I can't stand stories that take place in the past unless, of course, the basic idea of the story is time-travel. It seems to me that stories of the past are nothing more than historical novels, not science fiction or fantasy; for, while fantasy could have occurred in the past, it is hard to find it in stories of cave-men and jungle-dwellers. Of course this is my opinion, and that is why in getting back to this issue I was highly pleased; no stories of the past.

Before I discuss the stories themselves and give praise I'd like to find a few faults.

(1) The cover had no connection with the story "The Terrible Puppets". You say "Front Cover painting suggested by a scene from 'The Terrible Puppets'". I say, no such thing, because Jones, in my opinion, never read the story. I do believe that you had the painting; it was good; so you matched it with a story you had on file.

(2) Not enough short 5,000 to 7,000-word stories. In my humble opinion, one long story, several of the above stories, and a few 2,500-word stories make a perfect reading issue.

It just so happens that both novels were excellent in this issue. "Dark Benediction" was the best. Miller has an excellent style and writes a suspenseful story. It would pay to hold on to him.

Fairman's "Terrible Puppets" was good also. A little different than the run-of-the-mill hidden race stories; although for a minute I thought I was reading Shaver.

"Mission Accomplished" a dull story with a trite ending.

"The Catpaw"—different and unusual. "The Secret of John March"—very bad for McGivern, who is usually tops with me.

I have only two possible story desires: time-travel stories and robot stories.

On the subject of that cover again, while you didn't have a story to go with it, it still provokes several good story

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ideas. I might even write a story to go with it. Don't be surprised to find a manuscript with my name on it on your desk in a few months. I might be another "Wellman" or even a "Shaver"—no, not that.

Here's wishing you continued success with your magazine.

Erwin A. Hoffman
1824 S. W. 16th Terrace
Miami, Florida

Jones' cover is symbolic—the tortoise re-hearing the actor. You say this cover provokes several good story ideas—well, the plot for "The Terrible Puppets" is what author Fairman saw when we assigned him to do a lead story revolving around this cover.

We've got exciting time-travel and robot stories coming soon. Watch for them. Ed.

WANTED: EXCHANGERS

Dear Friend:

About time I dropped you a line. Been with your AMAZING from away back around 1932 when I was just a little squirt. Took up FANTASTIC when it came up. Noticed you wanted reaction to "We the Machine", so here is mine. Pretty good.

But I liked "Whom the Gods Would Slay" in FA some better. Ripping dialogue and pretty passable humor. All characters were

good, but wasn't enough of Freya.

"The Dead Don't Die" was another good one. Covers don't bother me. If my friends don't like them that's their hard luck.

Any stamp collectors in our crowd? Need some exchangers. Also for back issues of stuff.

Karl Klondike
Harrisburg, Illinois

EMERALDS FROM THE EMERALD ISLE

Dear Ed:

This is the first time I have ever read your book, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. "The Masters of Sleep, by Ron Hubbard, was the lead novel in the issue I was able to get. I wish to thank you, for it's very good reading.

I would be very grateful to you if you would publish this for me, as it is very hard for me to get this magazine here. Maybe someone over there would be so kind as to send me their old copies and I may be able to do something for them in return for their kindness.

Ted O'Neill
2 Windmill Street
Limerick, Eire

If we know our readers, Ted, you'll be deluged with old issues of FA. Happy reading! Ed.

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